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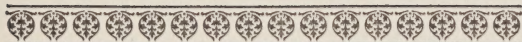


HEATHER HERETICS

MARSHALL · N · GOOLD



HEATHER HERETICS



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Boston and New York

1926

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The Riverside Press

CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

To my old pal
GORDON CARMICHAEL
and to Morag of that ilk



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HEATHER HERETICS



CHAPTER I

FUGITIVE YOUTH

BEYOND a doubt, Donald Strachan is the only veritable criminal who was ever bailed out of Duke Street Jail of a Saturday night that he might be able to preach the gospel the following morning. And he was developing an unmistakable black eye at the time.

Nor was it any mere misdemeanor on which he had been arrested. Donald never did things by halves. The charge preferred against him was a splendid comprehensive charge, a charge of which even a Bill Sikes would have had no reason to feel ashamed. It included breaking and entering, theft of comestibles, willful and malicious destruction of property; and, as if that were not sufficient, violent resistance of established authority and refusal to heed the reading of the Riot Act. On any one of such counts the most happy-go-lucky optimist might just as well have resigned himself to the prospect of sixty days without the option. Indeed, it was a surprising feature of the case that a felon so dangerous and versatile should have been bailable at all. But the night-magistrate, a

worthy soul of deep insight into human character, took the extenuating circumstances into consideration, and let him go . . . temporarily.

As a matter of fact, Donald had had no inherent right at all to take part in the rioting which invariably marks the triennial election of a Lord Rector of Glasgow University. It is the prerogative of a mere undergraduate. He was already done with Gilmorehill, a Master of Arts, in his second year as a theological student at Lyndoch Street Divinity Hall, and had presumably put away childish things: aye, an earnest youth, trysted to the Free Kirk of Scotland. But when Joe Chamberlain, the Honorable Joe, apostle of Imperialism and a far-flung battle line, was put up in the Conservative interest against Augustine Birrell, and the penny trumpets of war shrilled the summons in the West End Park, he felt the call of the blood.

Crazed undergraduates, with their jackets turned inside out, were already fighting alluringly with pea-scooters and tissue-paper pokes of flour in the sacred purlieus of Sauchiehall Street and Charing Cross. Char-à-bancs, gaudily decorated with immemorial red or blue, and overloaded with clamant partisans, thundered up Renfield Street, or obstructed the traffic while they grappled with one another in mortal combat on Jamaica Bridge. It was just as if King Carnival had strayed by accident into the gray northern city . . . hardened a trifle, perhaps . . . lost somewhat of his wonted

geniality. All the movement and color and gayety were there, but hard knocks were pretty freely given and taken. Peasemeal swept here and there like thick mist; and staid citizens scuttled to cover with no more than a chuckle over the follies of youth.

It is hard to resist that sort of thing at twenty-two.

Donald, in his dreary lodgings, stirred uneasily to the tumult. Like Job's charger, he said Ha, Ha, among the trumpets, smelled the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. He found himself almost involuntarily turning his jacket inside out, took a final glance at a perfectly good sermon, and dashed headlong into the jolly fray. He had never read 'Obiter Dicta,' Mr. Birrell's greatest bid for fame; but he knew the Liberals would welcome an adherent, who had captained the soccer team, and weighed upwards of thirteen stone.

A very Hal o' the Wynd was Donald when it came to a rough-and-tumble, capable and workmanlike in any physical towzie, just as he ever was in combat with spiritual iniquity. He enjoyed it. He believed in it. Aye, and he could produce reason for the faith that was in him.

Once on a time, an earnest but anæmic Christian worker had joined issue with him on this matter of wasting time, precious moments that could never be retrieved, in athletic sports and such-like frivolity; and had straightway drawn upon him-

self withering rebuke and lofty argument that drove him sadly abashed from the contest.

‘Man,’ said Donald, ‘you have my pity. It’s a sorry relic o’ mediæval doctrine you’ve a hold of. Get you back to Saint Paul, and just see how many illustrations and analogies he gathered frae the sports o’ his time. We *wrestle* against principalities and powers . . . Fight the good *fight* . . . I press toward the *goal* . . . the *goal*, mark ye! Aye; yon was the bonnie wee fighter, whether in the flesh or in the spirit; and what was good enough for Paul is good enough for Donald Strachan. Forby that, I’m thinkin’, the man that develops his muscle and his stamina for a great work might almost be said to be playing to the glory o’ God. . . . And that’s that.’

That was, in very truth, that. It was final. It expressed his working philosophy. His crude but vital idea of God was actually wrought into the relations of everyday life. And he had no real compunction in closing down upon his preparation for the morrow. To do him justice, it had been thorough and conscientious till the strife broke out; but here was cogent demand upon his thews and sinews that could not be denied. Pity it was on a Saturday, of course. In a well-ordered community these things would be timed to start on Monday morning. But he must needs make the best of it. He had no conception then into what an unseemly pother he was like to blunder. It is doubtful if it would have stopped him, anyhow.

So he began the day in the fighting turret of a red char-à-banc, heavily munitioned with a barrel of peasemeal, and swarming striplings, each one of whom was a piece of ordnance. He distinguished himself. He could not help it. He was conspicuous as Saul among his people. Busy men of affairs paused, at a safe distance, to appraise his feats . . . some, perhaps, with a certain wistfulness, as though their affairs began to look a little drab by contrast. There had been a time in their own experience, a splendid, halcyon time. . . . Ah, youth! Fugitive youth! What had come of the glory and the freshness of a dream?

Donald himself, though, was not visited at the moment by any thought of the brevity of youth. He was fully occupied otherwise. Fair students of Queen Margaret's College smiled on him as they wended their way to the polls, and bright eyes of neutral maidens beamed encouragement from open windows. It might have been a tournament of eld. He was not in shining armor, nor attended by heralds, trumpeters, and pursuivants. But what of that! He was bearing himself right gallantly in the lists, with no thought save for the work in hand, a knightly figure, sinking ever deeper and deeper into the broad Highland tongue as the conflict proceeded.

'Tak' that, will ye!'

'That' was a large bag of peasemeal which burst shrewdly in the cockpit of a hostile craft; and Donald paused a moment, to mop his damp

brow and give expression to a strangely solemn thought.

'Preserve us! Whatna waste o' the merrcies!'

It was, in a way, awful... heartrending! A whole supper gone, to emphasize a political opinion! A month o' suppers! The wherewithal for good brose was never meant to be thrown about in that prodigal fashion.

But there was little time to ponder economics. A boarding-party materialized, as if from nowhere. The stour of battle rose again. Foemen had foothold on the char-à-banc. A mouth, wide open in the very bawl of triumph, was neatly stopped with a handful of the precious meal. Another supper to the good cause! Panting bodies were unceremoniously bundled into the street. Soldier work, and close enough!

Incidentally, Donald filled his mouth with hard green peas, and directed his pea-scooter at an innocent bespectacled youth on the pavement. No man had a right to don a blue necktie that morning, if he were not an undergraduate, and a Conservative at that. He was asking for it. Donald himself was by no means going unscathed. He had a fast-swelling bruise on his shin, and he was not wholly sure of every seam in his apparel. He had a grisly suspicion that something had given way. What about it! On, on! Hark to the skirl of the pibroch! And the red char-à-banc rolled bravely on to new adventures in the Passage of Arms.

Later in the day, Donald Strachan might have been found, weary, and disheveled, and dustier than any miller, in command of a decrepit four-wheeler, a prize of war, and getting great worship thereby, for it was under constant attack, and almost defenseless. In this thing he drove voters to and from the polls, till brawny foemen climbed over the back of it, tore him in Homeric struggle from the dicky, and, dropping him exhausted to the cobbles, restored the cab to its original colors.

These were strenuous crowded hours. They brought a glow of real satisfaction, if little else. He was not fighting because he expected to win. Augustine Birrell had little chance against the magic of Joe Chamberlain. The cause was worthy enough . . . Donald was liberal in politics as in religion; but he was fighting, mainly, for the sheer joy of battle. Thus far, he had borne himself valiantly upon a forlorn hope, a knight beyond reproach. No one could point a finger at him.

It was only at the close of day he lapsed. For what happened then there was no palliation, despite the benign commissioner of bail and the subsequent verdict of twelve good men and true. It was altogether deplorable. Grievously, like Lucifer, Star of the Morning, he fell from his high estate. Donald himself never attempted to excuse his conduct. He would look back upon it with a certain ashamed bewilderment. If he ever spoke of it, it was to remind himself of the unexpected frailty of human nature.

‘Aye, but we’re a’ very imperfect creatures; and we never can jalouse what a day may bring forth.’

It happened on this wise.

The Conservative candidate had been duly elected; and all constituents forthwith dropped their party interests, and, as one, celebrated the victory with hilarious torchlight procession. They piled their torches in Kelvinside Park, and, following the time-honored custom of raiding a theater, turned inevitably to the New Skating Palace.

Glasgow was very proud in those days of its Skating Palace, a vast structure of glass which boasted real ice. There was vaudeville, too, provided for those who preferred it; but there was no reason to emphasize that in Donald’s hearing. Primarily, it was a Skating Palace. Everything had been done that could be done to make it appear as a Mecca to the youth of the town, and the question of a place of amusement in which to round off a perfect day was never really discussed.

Donald would never have dreamed of setting foot in a theater. He came of a stern Presbyterian stock which put theaters, theodicy, and thievery on the same ethical plane. The choice of a real theater would just have sent him back to his sermon. But a Skating Palace is different . . . almost innocuous, indeed, if regarded simply as such. Light-heartedly enough, he joined the jesting singing raiders on the march, little recking of all that was portended.

As a rule, on those occasions, the undergraduates

had been made welcome to any theater they cared to select. In fact, managers put themselves out considerably to lure them on, while taking every care to present the appearance of being carried by storm. The raiders, thronging the sixpenny gallery, expanded and monopolized and brightened the intermissions, and attracted vast patronage to the more expensive parts of the house. Their very presence there was a tribute and a testimony. It was good publicity. Invariably, they passed the hat before they left. Every one was satisfied.

But the officials of the Skating Palace hopelessly misunderstood the etiquette of the occasion. They had wind of the coming of the raiders, and greeted them in dead earnest with a three-inch fire-hose, swept the vanguard off their feet, drenched them to the skin. And it was a raw November night, and a snell wind blowing.

The thing was an outrage, entirely unexpected and deeply resented. Abruptly, the song froze on their lips. Attack was changed for the moment to ignominious rout. Jestng gave way to murmur, bitter and sinister, like the ominous murmur of Turthor's stream in the misty vale of Gormal . . . a murmur to be heeded. But the Skating Palace officials were all puffed up with pride and vain-glory. They kept the hose going.

Now, you cannot argue with a fire-hose any more than you can argue with a woman who wields a wet mop. The way is simply closed. But it makes no demand upon chivalry. And there was a

green-grocer's shop providentially situated there on Sauchiehall Street, precisely opposite the big crystal building. There was only to break a plate-glass window, and all sorts of compact missiles lay to hand: turnips, onions, sacks and sacks of potatoes.

By actual count, the damage was 1182 panes of glass before the reluctant Highland police quelled the riot and lodged some half-dozen conspicuous rioters in jail.

A wild Saturday evening's work.

All very reprehensible, of course; but the proprietors of the Palace might have known that those who live in glass houses should there cultivate tact and discretion.

Whether or not Donald had wrought great damage . . . he had a potato in each hand when arrested . . . he had certainly been conspicuous. It was inherent in him to be conspicuous in time of stress, and he was very wet and very disgruntled. Also, when he was overpowered, an outraged constable definitely identified him as the irreverent chiel who had wedged his helmet over his eyes and immobilized him for several precious moments when the battle was at its height. That was bound to tell against him. But Donald had thrown discretion to the winds. Even when he had been duly warned that any remark he made was liable to be used against him as evidence, he delivered himself of a remark that was distinctly incriminating.

'Man,' he said solemnly to P. C. 9876, 'yon was a frightful alluring target.'

'It was that,' admitted his captor, who came from the wilds of the Outer Hebrides. 'Fegs! It was that, richt enough!'

And he made no entry in his little black book.

Donald, you may be sure, was not marched off through lines of ardent sympathizers without making it known that he had an appointment to preach at Carmyle the following morning.

'I've just minded it,' he said, in some dismay.

That meant a hasty whip-around among the sobered students, and cheerful subscription of the wherewithal to bail him out, as he had every reason to expect. His was a special case. The other prisoners did not matter. It was an epoch-making event, from which great prestige might be garnered; and they had really no immediate need of freedom. But Donald Strachan had to preach, and he was duly brought forth to that end, very wet and subdued, divided between anxiety over an eye which gave him a strange blackguard appearance almost certain to provoke a determined curiosity in the body of the kirk, and a queer bewilderment over the psychological factors which had entered into his downfall. The excitement over, he was abashed and humiliated. He was more than a little distressed, too, lest his mother might get to hear of it up to Innerneuk. She could never be made to understand.

Of course it was the fire-hose, grotesquely enough, that had enkindled him. When one is

suddenly drenched to the skin of a winter night, he is either entirely broken in spirit or he goes berserk, and Donald's spirit could never be called brittle. Berserk it had to be. He was prepared to admit the error of his ways, but he was not prepared to exaggerate it unduly. He was going to preach. He had no doubt at all upon that point. He had suffered himself to be bailed out, expressly in order that he might preach. People must often have come out on bail with less worthy motives. He knew there were folk who might not consider him a fit and proper person to enter the pulpit. Such were the sort of folk with whom he disagreed entirely. Even Paul was mightily ashamed of some of the exploits of his youth, but he became a great apostle for all that; David, too, but he could still write psalms. If, sadly enough, we fall, we fall to rise . . . stepping-stones of dead selves . . . are baffled to fight better . . . all that sort of thing. Donald was whistling, as it were, to keep up his courage. With deep humility, he admitted a quaint novel self-knowledge that might even be an asset to a preacher; and, by virtue of that very humility, he was probably right. In any case, it was like to be a disconcerting experience.

A glance in the mirror on Sabbath morning confirmed his worst fears. Aye, it would excite curiosity. No brawling night-walker could ever have shown a more damnable eye.

'It must have been in that bit towzie on the machine I got it,' he mused. 'Machine' is Doric

for any horse-drawn vehicle. 'Mercy me! What an eye!'

But, in this matter at least, his conscience was clear. The black eye had nothing whatever to do with the felony that had landed him in Duke Street. It could be explained. It was an honorable scar . . . somewhat that might have happened to the best of men. Only, the bitterness of it is, no truthful explanation of a black eye is ever acceptable to any one. A scalp-wound or a broken leg, yes; but a black eye is a reproach of itself. A man will listen, and smile; and, months after, he will say: 'Remember that funny story you told about getting hauled off a cab?' . . . But no matter.

He went forth to do his duty.

'My friends,' he said, as he entered the pulpit, 'ere we proceed further, I have but one remark to make. Ye'll not misunderstand this eye o' mine. It was acquired yesterday by an unfortunate accident during the election of the Honorable Joseph Chamberlain to the Lord Rectorship o' Glasgow University.'

He delivered his apologia with dignity, and gazed slowly around on all sides, that his congregation might see for themselves, and be free of further distraction.

They listened. They saw for themselves. They smiled . . . just as he had foreseen they would smile.

'*Noo* we shall commence our public worship . . .'

Donald delivered a very powerful and acceptable

discourse on Elijah confronting the priests of Baal; and in due season returned to Duke Street to stand his trial.

But this sort of thing, he saw very clearly, would never do. Youth and the irresponsible joys of youth must needs be put aside. He had no need of any one to point the moral for him, though such were not lacking . . . kindly, well-meaning folk. He rather lost patience with them. He could see it for himself.

A phrase out of Wordsworth's immortal Ode flitted into memory:

‘Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy.’

It is always bound to happen sooner or later. Distressing, a little, to find the poet so literally pertinent; but it was no use blinking the idea he meant to convey.

True, there were no lasting evil consequences of the escapade. A gentle reprimand from the Faculty, of course, and a reminder that one must avoid the very appearance of evil . . . which was putting it mildly enough in all conscience . . . if his influence is to have due weight. Donald Strachan and his fellow prisoners were set free, if not without a stain upon their characters, at least by verdict of their peers that the charges preferred against them were ‘Not Proven.’

This, despite the fact that they had been taken red-handed, and Exhibit A, actually produced from

the pockets of the accused, would have made an excellent meal for a large family . . . a family of vegetarian persuasion.

It took Comrie Thomson to accomplish it; and he was the greatest criminal lawyer Scotland ever produced, the only man who could persuade a hard-headed Scotch jury that a midnight intruder with jemmy and dark lantern was a peaceable householder who had just mistaken another door for his own. The case was desperate, and Glasgow University rallied loyally to the cause of the unfortunates. No one less than Comrie Thomson would do. When he was briefed for the defense, every one breathed freely again. The result was a foregone conclusion . . . and, incidentally, a flagrant miscarriage of justice.

Nevertheless, the incident might be regarded as the turning-point in Donald's career. It marked the close of an epoch. It revealed the natural man; and it gave him furiously to think. It was the last flutter of fugitive youth. The ministry demands a certain sacrifice. No question about it. And Donald was prepared gladly to make sacrifice.

'All things are possible to me,' said his chosen mentor, the apostle Paul, 'but all things are not expedient. . . . Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.'

Hereafter, he must walk soberly, circumspectly.

And thus did Donald Strachan enter into his manhood.

CHAPTER II

GENESIS OF A MINISTER

(1)

DONALD came of poor but thrifty folk of Inner-neuk in the Grampians.

Thrifty! Of course the Scots are thrifty. How could they avoid being thrifty? They are not mean . . . wholly otherwise, indeed; but for generations these crofters of the North have had a mighty struggle to wrest their frugal living from the untowardly soil, and every hard-won bawbee counts.

Donald could have told many tales of strange shifts to make ends meet, and heroic frugality. But the deeper sacrifice of their own ambitions and hopes, the grim but splendid struggle on his behalf, which was a commonplace to his nearest kin, he could only surmise with growing reverence and humility in after years. For his mother, with the queer instinct of mothers, had set him apart from a babe like some infant Samuel; and her prayers for him were like to be fulfilled. Donald swiftly developed into a scholar to warm any dominie's heart, and a credit to the whole parish. When he was the merest bairn his copybook was a sight to see, and others of his class were so far behind him they might almost have been reckoned out of sight. Later, he assimilated the Latin and Greek to the manner born, and awed onlookers averred there

was really nothing beyond his reach. He could do things with the Shorter Catechism past believing. Aye, a lad of parts. And when a lad of parts stands forth in a crofter's family with the abrupt glory of a star in the night, there is just one right thing in all the world to do. Father and mother, brothers and sisters, toil and scrape and save and sacrifice beyond imagining, that he may go to college and have his opportunity . . . haply, if he be found worthy of it, and have the love of God in his heart, even wag his pow in a pulpit.

And Donald, girt with a meager bursary, well-won, and equipped by sacrifice of blood and tears and pride, entered the promised land, which was more distant than fabled Carcassonne to his kindred kind; and they, having immolated themselves in private upon the family altar, pass out of the story. Doubtless they had their reward. Donald would see to that, you may be sure, as opportunity served.

He had a rough time in the beginning, when he came up to Glasgow University; but he found lodgings with a sonsie motherly soul, who asked only eight shillings and sixpence a week for board and shelter, and found it in her heart even to take oversight of his socks and underclothes as well. His bursary, less the sacred tithe which he would not touch even if he starved, would just about run to it. It would be close, desperately close; but it might be managed.

His next concern, of course, was to find a min-

ister he could sit under with pleasure and profit . . . no light task for one who had been accustomed to the ministrations of the Reverend Hamish Todd of Innerneuk.

Yon was one who seldom spoke for less than an hour, and his matter was meaty through and through. Donald had often stayed and heard it all over again in the Gaelic. He had the Gaelic on his mother's side.

Life had been grave and simple up there. They were not thralls of clock and calendar; they were bondsmen of the Lord. They lived in their religion, as the rural Scots will, finding in it their one absorbing interest, their unfailing comfort, even their amusement. There was little to distract their attention or dissipate their minds. The weekly newspaper was not sensational. No theater or dance-hall would have been tolerated to compete with the social meeting at the kirk. No Sabbath pastime could have been conceived that would keep them away from the services. Diets, they called them: the morning diet and the evening diet, and by them they were sustained. They kept alive the mystic side of their nature. In the weekly discourses they found their material for meditation or heated argument, and ever returned to the kirk for more. There they had been christened, of course. No God-fearing minister would ever baptize a babe outside the hallowed walls, unless both parents were bedridden. Why should he? There, as a rule, they mated; and there they were

wed. Such a village comes near to the shining city of Ezekiel's vision. The sanctuary is in the midst of it; and from under the threshold comes the water of life, and everything liveth, whithersoever the water cometh.

But Glasgow was an enormous place of strange cults and multitudinous kirks, which ran mainly to twenty-minute topical sermons that had neither heads nor points. Pretty enough bits of talk they were, whiles, but sadly lacking in nutriment to a healthy spiritual appetite. It was very dwarfing and depressing. Life had so many secular interests, religion seemed to have shrunk a bit. Yet in Glasgow, Donald surmised, they sorely needed the kirk. Amid all the bustle and distraction it was just about as hard to hear the voice of God as it would be for a poet to hear the music of the spheres while a hurdy-gurdy was grinding out the latest ditty of the halls. And he did not mean that for an aspersion either on Glasgow or hurdy-gurdies. He just felt that it was essential for one to get apart for a bit, from time to time, and possess his soul. But people did not seem to go to the kirk as a matter of course, and, if they did, they were apt to be put off with these trifling fragments of rhetoric. Some even scoffed at the kirk and all for which it stood . . . foolishly enough . . . as though a man could live by bread alone.

Then, again, strange methods, strange to Donald Strachan, were used to attract custom.

There was a man on Bath Street, for instance,

who filled his kirk to overflowing every Sabbath evening, merely by the sensational topics he announced.

Donald saw through most of them at a glance.

‘The Devil’s Razor!’

‘That’ll be Samson and Delilah, of course. A questionable title; but it’ll excite curiosity in the minds o’ the uninformed.’

‘Two Shinbones and a Bit of an Ear!’

‘Amos three and twelve,’ cogitated Donald, ‘and a revised reading at that. The Authorized Version has plain legs.’

‘By the Skin of the Teeth!’

‘That’s Job,’ said Donald, ‘though I dare say there are people who will regard it as slang.’

It was hard to faze Donald on that sort of thing. But there came a day when he stared uncomprehendingly at the notice-board of the Bath Street Kirk, rubbed his eyes, and stared again.

‘Shall a Man Marry his Landlady’s Daughter?’ it demanded in brave display of red and black.

‘Preserve us!’ said Donald huskily. ‘Where’s he gotten a text for that?’

He wrestled gamely against the temptation to attend and find out. It would be condoning something he despised. But it was of no avail. He could not rest. And, the following Sabbath evening, he might have been found in the queue, and well up to the head of it too, a little shame-faced, but determined to get to the bottom of the matter.

He heard the sermon, and was disillusioned.

Scriptural enough, for that bit of it. There was a little introduction on Jacob serving seven years for Rachel . . . his landlady's daughter, beyond all question, the while he served. Donald wondered why he had not thought on it. Then followed a singularly simple and wholesome little talk on the loneliness of men in lodgings and the quiet joys of domestic life. But there was nothing solid or satisfying about it for a Gaelic sermon-taster, nothing to carry off and meditate fiercely for days to come. Donald turned unfilled away. Gey fushionless watery stuff! Pap for babes, if you like.

It was several weeks before he found his spiritual home; and in that time he had heard a preacher who had a distinct leaning to Antinomianism . . . oh, a wild heresy aimed at the destruction of the moral law in the interest of Christian freedom . . . ethical anarchism. What does theft matter, or adultery, or manslaughter, so long as you have faith? . . . something like that. He had heard a reformed burglar, and a man who was neither more nor less than a socialist. This last was the one near the Canal, who went in for Pleasant Sunday Afternoons for Bargemen. It was a P.S.A. that finished Donald.

'P.S.A. indeed!' quoth he. 'If ever I'm ordained, I'll guarantee there'll be no pleasant Sunday afternoons in *my* kirk.'

But one day he blundered into a little sanctuary near Saint Andrew's Halls; and into the pulpit there ascended a benevolent old minister, who

might have stepped right out of Lorimer's 'Ordination of Elders,' of which a cheap copy hung on the best room wall up in the cottage at Innerneuk. There were few worshipers in the place . . . he did not seem to be a popular preacher; but at the very sight of the man something whispered to Donald's fluttering heartstrings: Peace, be still.

Thereafter, little mattered. The thing was as good as settled. But it stood to reason that this preacher would use neither hymn nor paraphrase, that he would be sound in doctrine, and that he would deal with his subject-matter under three orthodox heads, with orderly subdivisions.

He spoke for forty-eight minutes. Donald timed him.

At the close of the service, Donald Strachan marched straight out to the vestry, and, upon being admitted, laid down on the table his precious disjunction-certificate from the church in the Highlands.

'I'm frae Innerneuk,' he said; 'and ye'll be glad to know I'm wishful to join your communion. I've sought far and wide, and I've had my disappointments; but at last I've found you, and ye're the one for me to sit under.'

Reverend Fergus Carmichael flung the gown over the back of a chair, and took him by the hand, and bade him welcome. He had a twinkle in his eye, and a little white fringe of beard just under his chin, from ear to ear, and a firm grip . . . a man full of years and human kindness; the very salt of the earth.

‘Sit ye down . . . Sit ye down,’ he begged his visitor.

And he asked Donald of his home in Innerneuk and his work in Glasgow, and Donald told him. It was a great relief. For weeks he had been practically inarticulate.

The beadle came in reverently with the big pulpit Bible and Psalm-book, deposited them on the table, and slipped out again without ever disturbing the spell, noiselessly closing the door behind him. Donald had an instant vision of a beadle some day treating him in his own vestry just like that . . . a vision to strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees.

And the old man talked on, and paid glowing tribute to the Reverend Hamish Todd, with whom he sometimes forgathered at the Edinburgh Assembly. The ache of homesickness in Donald was already wondrously allayed. He knew he had chosen well.

‘*Noo*,’ he said, ‘what about pew-rent?’

Thereafter, he was able to settle down to work with a free mind.

(2)

He had little time for the social life of the University. Whatever he could snatch from his studies was given loyally to the soccer team. His natural talent for the game had found full scope in the rough-and-tumble matches up in Innerneuk. He had inherited a pair of long tough legs and a keen

and masterful brain. He developed an amazing turn of speed, and an uncanny ability to shoot on the run from all sorts of weird angles. In his second year at Gilmorehill he was center-forward of the team and a marked man, the idol of the undergraduates.

But he kept his head. Dissipation was the highway to hell, anyhow. He had brought that wholesome conviction with him. And it was reinforced by the knowledge acquired that it was a blasphemous breach of training rules. He cherished that body of his as a trust; and it was no paltry trust. His was a fine well-set-up figure of a lad. Like hundreds of other clean-hearted sincere college boys, he worked hard and he played hard.

He was up long before the late winter dawn, and dressed in the dark, for he must needs make his tea on a shaky wee tripod over the gas the while he dressed. That left him little enough light to be going on with. It was bitterly cold as a rule. Scotch houses, for the most part, have no heat save in the kitchen and the sitting-room. The rest of the house is just abandoned to the winter Jotun. And, in any case, the fires are not kindled till the landlady gets up. Hardy souls, the Scots. Classes began at eight; and one had to wear a docky but gorgeous scarlet gown, which brought a blaze of color into the otherwise drab classroom. There were long but stimulating evenings of study by the gaslight; an hour here and there of strenuous training on field or cinder-track . . . sometimes a bout

with the gloves; and the glamour of the game on Saturday afternoon . . . the tussle and the dash for goal, ball at toe . . . yells of the spectators. Great! A hard life, but congenial.

Sabbath was a day apart. Never a game was played on Sabbath. Never a book, even, was touched on Sabbath, save only the Bible, or perhaps 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' or Fox's 'Book of Martyrs.'

But Donald got into a way, here in Glasgow, of actually going for a stroll after the kirk service, a thing he would never have thought of doing up to Innerneuk. Sometimes it was a mere leisurely daunder through the Botanical Gardens or the West End Park, not without misgivings at first; sometimes, on a sunny afternoon, a swinging tramp away out into the real country by Bearsden or Milngavie. There was something out in the open that his soul craved; and, after all, when he came to think it out for himself, and he was getting the way of thinking things out for himself, he had good authority for believing that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. There were parts of Scotland where they seemed to have forgotten that. The remembrance of it came to Donald with almost the force of a revelation.

It was his first real break with ancient and somewhat narrow prejudices . . . how radical a break no one could guess who was unfamiliar with the way the Sabbath day was kept up among the Grampians. It was the first adverse comment he had

made on his stern upbringing. He just begged to differ. It was the first hint that in religious matters he might act according to the light of his own intelligence, and leave the dead past to bury its dead. Aye, it was the first symptom of heresy, even if only the keenest sort of diagnostician could ever have detected it . . . promising, though, so far as it went.

Of course, he could by no means escape the ardors and fevers and urges of adolescence. He was just on the threshold of man's estate, and almost incredibly innocent. Winsome voices began to whisper within him, insidiously, cogently. He took them to be siren voices, but could find no sublimated cotton-wool for the inner ear. This alarmed him considerably. He must needs listen to solemn and sophisticated discussions about women; and life, here and there, gave him glimpses of wild and dangerous beauties. He dreamed strange dreams. He was conscious of a vague unrest, and, above all, an overwhelming curiosity.

That settled it. He went to the Public Library. In those days, it was a dingy evil-smelling place on Miller Street, just off Argyll Street. And, on answering some embarrassing questions with perfect frankness, he was allowed to withdraw those carefully guarded books he had heard favorably mentioned. He waded through them after his conscientious fashion; but he found them, on the whole, disappointing. Gargantua and Pantagruel bored him to distraction. What on earth did

Robert Browning mean when he wrote enthusiastically of forgetting some solemn oaf over a jolly chapter of Rabelais? He turned furtively the pages of Chaucer and Boccaccio, Don Juan, certain lesser lights of the Elizabethan galaxy. This was in the days of Victorian repression. Exciting enough these certainly were, interesting in their way . . . not, perhaps, the best way, he thought; but they did not give him what he wanted. Suggestiveness only added fuel to the fire. It was hard facts he was after.

Eventually, on a visit to Jim Tosh, a medical student and a team-mate, he abruptly let loose what was on his mind.

‘I’ve been thinking, Jim,’ he said, ‘on ethics, as applied to this matter o’ sex . . . if ye take my meaning.’

Jim staggered slightly, but kept his lines intact.

‘A fairly comprehensive subject o’ meditation, Donald!’

‘Imphm! It’s all that. And it seems to me that a great deal o’ petty vice comes frae sheer curiosity . . . which is in itself a legitimate and highly commendable outreach o’ the human spirit.’

Jim Tosh mulled it over for a space, smoking silently.

‘Ye’ll find there’s a whole lot more to it than that,’ he decided. ‘We medicals learn a good deal about such matters in the course of business, but I have yet to learn that we are especially esteemed for the loftiness of our morals.’

'Doctors are no bad,' Donald put in, '... once they're full-fledged.'

The other calmly ignored the implied reflection upon the unfeathered brood. After all, he might almost be said to have asked for it.

'No, ye canna make the lust o' the flesh a mere matter o' curiosity. It's a mighty big problem ...'

'Hoot, aye,' said Donald; 'it's far too complicated to be solved by a single formula. As you say, there's more to it than mere curiosity. *In primis*, a perfectly healthy and natural human instinct, so long as it's not abused. Then, there's the inherent wickedness o' the human soul ... though, mind you, I'm coming to doubt the inherence ...'

Jim gravely shook his head.

'Terrible!' he said. 'Man, but you're going the pace, Donald!'

'Aye; there's a gradual uprooting o' the old landmarks, a slipping away frae the old traditions ... but never heed that the now. Let's keep to the case in point. Then, there's a certain disregard o' a clear point of honor.'

Donald edged forward on his chair, and, with boyish solemnity, let loose one honest-to-goodness conviction he had just grabbed for himself out of the welter of ethics.

'See here, Jim. I hope one day to take a clean maid to wife. It's only fair and square of me, is it not, to give her a clean return?'

No double standard of morality for Donald

Strachan. He could make short work of that in a twinkling.

Jim pondered again for a space.

‘Decidedly so,’ he said.

‘But, as for this matter o’ curiosity, what’s to do when ye’re in a dark room, and liable at any moment to bark your shins on invisible objects, to your hurt?’

That was easy.

‘Screw up the gas,’ said Jim.

‘Precisely. It’s light, more light and fuller, that we need. That’s why I want to understand in a straightforward way the human economy, male and female.’

Jim Tosh placidly indicated with a wave of the hand a row of ponderous textbooks on a shelf.

‘Ye may find,’ he said, ‘your curiosity goes a hanged sight deeper than that; but help yourself, and stop bothering me.’

With great deliberation, Donald chose out an advanced Physiology and an Anatomy, hesitated a moment, and bravely annexed a Midwifery. At least, knowledge is power.

‘Thanks,’ he said, and departed.

(3)

Much more terrifying was a certain foggy transition period in his faith . . . a soul-blanching period.

All very well for the average man to indulge his dilettante doubt, and nurse his intellectual difficulties as if they were virtues. He can carry on his

everyday business the while he debates with his soul. He can leave problems unsolved, if he likes. Donald met many such. But suppose this *is* your business; suppose your dearest kin have blotted out their own lives to equip you to preach from the pulpit the sacred verities they have bequeathed you; suppose this has been from the earliest years the fundamental desire of your own being; and just at the last moment you begin to doubt these verities! Would not that jar you? It knocks your business on the head at the very outset. Why! it would break your mother's heart if you went back to the plough . . . not a mere failure, but, of all terrible things in the world, a skeptic! For honest skepticism, for some obscure reason, is apt to be regarded in the Highlands as rather more lurid than arson . . . a fearsome and indestructible reproach.

That was the situation. What was a man to do?

For months, Donald lied cheerfully in his letters home . . . lied by the very cheerfulness of his letters home. He dared not let out the truth to yon old soft-hearted one, who had taught him 'The Lord's my shepherd,' and worn her fingers to the bone that he might go to college. But it was awful.

He had come up to Glasgow worshiping a curiously Mosaic God, before whom the only logical attitude was fear and trembling. When he read his New Testament, he read it through the implacable and not-yet-wholly-opened eyes of Hebrew prophets. You see, he had begun with the Old, and

he never could get away from it. He had been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Old; and there is a lot more admonition than nurture to be found there. He did not regard the early Hebrew religion sensibly, as he would have regarded, for instance, the early Greek philosophy in the Hylicists or Pythagoreans or Eleatics, as the first meager source of a great flowing stream, that gathers form and force and breadth and volume all down the ages, sweeping on to the great deep. No; it was a changeless, finished, revealed thing. He lifted his eyes to it, as he lifted his eyes to the eternal hills and the constant stars. And, of course, it got him into no end of difficulties.

He had a firm belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. His creed was ready-made. He was quite sincere. He regarded the Bible much as ancient Israelites regarded the Ark of the Covenant . . . something on which no unhallowed finger must be laid . . . something above and beyond all criticism. It was his very Shekinah.

And yet . . .

He tried not to think overmuch on the first chapter of Genesis, to go no farther. It seemed to commit a man to the belief that the earth was the center of the universe; and the earth was flat; and light and darkness were substances created some three days before the sun and the stars, and the evening and the morning were the first day; and the sky was a solid roof overhead, upholding a heavenly sea, which, on the occasion of the Flood,

poured down through open windows. That was asking a good deal of a man's faith . . . even of his credulity. Better leave it alone for a time.

He noted in passing that an account of the naming of Bethel in the thirty-fifth chapter of Genesis was at some variance with an account in the twenty-eighth chapter. A small matter, but it troubled him. Why should God proffer two dissimilar stories of the same event? He tried to put it out of his head. He knew men, hosts of conscientious, dependable, well-read men, who insisted that there was not an inaccuracy in the whole of Scripture. The Devil prompted him to wonder if they had not skimmed some bits. Certainly it seemed unlikely that God could have dictated these bits word for word. But that was a blasphemous sort of thought to think. If some matters seemed incredible to the human understanding, they must be accepted somehow in the faith that it was only the human understanding that was at fault. If there were apparent contradictions, they must be ignored in the faith that they were only apparent.

Thus he had received it of his father, who had received it of his father. It was final.

Day by day, they had gone through the Bible up there in that little Highland home, a chapter from the Old Testament every morning, and a chapter from the New Testament after tea, verse about. Reach the end, and start all over.

Occasionally, on the approach of an incident that

seemed better called to the attention only of maturity, or after two or three verses of an interminable genealogical table or a list of the temple furnishings, the grim old man might say:

‘Let us pass on to the twenty-seventh verse.’

But he said it reluctantly. Such things, of course, were not really, in frail human understanding, to be compared with the Psalms of David or the Sermon on the Mount; but they had their place in the Word, and were not to be lightly regarded.

Then, of a Sabbath afternoon, there were endless games of quoting and finding texts, trials of strength and subtilty in the Scriptures. And there were Sabbath School examinations, from which it were black shame to emerge with less than a first-class certificate. Donald was proud possessor of the Honors certificate, granted to such as can produce six ordinary certificates, four at least of which are first-class, and two of the senior grade. Donald’s had all been first-class.

But the Higher Criticism was in the air. Something they called Modernism crept over the land like a deadly miasma . . . just about as hard to combat. These were yeasty, troublous times in the Scottish Kirk.

In 1880, Professor Robertson Smith, of Aberdeen, had openly questioned the authenticity of some passages in Scripture. A committee had been appointed to investigate his works, and on their finding he had been deposed. Then Alexander Bruce and Marcus Dods took up his mantle. An

attempt was made to get them ousted; but things had moved forward. In 1890, it was decided that the two professors must carry on their teaching according to their lights. A startling decision; it bade fair to turn a whole world topsy-turvy. The Free Kirk was acquiring the name of the 'Heresy-Hunting Kirk,' and the hunting was good; but convictions were now hard to get. Dr. A. B. Davidson was quietly insisting that the accepted views of revelation would have to be seriously altered; and George Adam Smith was offering strange new interpretations of the Old Testament . . . a *hinterland* of the New he called it, which was suggestive, but disconcerting. And all these were big men, wise men, of whose sincerity there could be no question.

Moreover, Darwin's Theory of Evolution was at long last gradually coming to be accepted by the Kirk, and it gave a shrewd ding to the date 4004 B.C., clearly inscribed in the margin of the Bible as the date on which the world was created. If there was any truth in evolution, what about Genesis? Aye; that was the question. What about Genesis?

Troublous times, these, for a sincere student.

In the Mitchell Library, Donald studied the latest theological literature . . . heady stuff, some of it. He was moved to amazement, and violent protest, and troubled pondering. He could not help himself. Before long, he was sadly befogged. Bit by bit, his cherished faith eluded him. One by one,

the guiding lights went out. It was only patience he needed . . . such patience as every good mariner conjures up, the while he makes his position by dead reckoning and shapes his course by such instruments as lie to hand, till sun and stars come back to the great good arch of sky. But how is a boy to know?

Nature and life lose all their beauty in these confused, indecisive states. The dark of tempest is redeemed by its movement and passion. One may even delight in it. The clear night is a treasure-house of stars. But the uncertain light from a hidden sky, baffled by wan mist, is only a mockery. It is a sorry travesty of the exultant daylight. It seems like the memory of some dazzling illusion, drab gray now that the illusionment is known.

To Donald it seemed like the end of everything. He grew familiar with black despair.

And as he flung himself into the shrouded future, no foot of the way disclosed, he heard, as the croak of some foul haunter of the mist, an audible voice, mocking, persistent: What use to be a preacher, when you have nothing to preach? Is it worth while? Is anything at all worth while?

Why! he even meditated a mysterious disappearance . . . Oh, nothing lethal. He would just begin again in some distant, secluded, unprofaned spot, where no hopes were built on him, and his very name was unknown. It would be cruel; but not so cruel as to remain and make a mock of these hopes. Still . . . there was no immediate hurry. He

blundered on in humiliation and self-reproach, seeing his doubt as a sinister and loathly infidelity that poisoned the very springs of life.

It was a long time before he could summon up the courage to take the matter to Mr. Carmichael. He felt just like some fugitive from justice moved by a queer whim to give himself up to the police. But a day came when he poured out the whole pitiful tale, babbling at large of ruined ambitions, and a wrecked faith, and a wasted life. It was all there. He kept nothing back.

He made an end of it, and bowed his head. Heaven and he alone knew what he awaited . . . excommunication of the soul . . . excommunication . . . all sorts of devastating things.

And, instead, the old man just put an arm about his shoulders, and rallied him with a kind of humorous gentleness, infinitely comforting, which Donald knew his own father could never have assumed under the circumstances.

‘Aye, laddie; and how old are you? . . . Nineteen? . . . Twenty? . . . Man, but you’ve the fine cheek to be talking of a wasted life, when you’ve scarce begun to live. Imphm! A wasted life! You’re but a bairn, lamenting that all the waves and all the billows have passed over you, at the first sign of growing-pains. Cheer up. Every thinking man has to go through it as soon’s ever he begins to think. It’s like teething in babes, one of the first signs o’ development, gey painful, but the common lot. No call to be ashamed of it.’

Donald ventured to lift his head a trifle. He could scarce believe his ears.

‘Faith, Donald, ye maun understand, is rather like love. It is something it is not in our power to give. It has to be compelled by that which is worthy of it; and you need never fear but that it shall be compelled, if you keep an open mind. Why! a man just has to question every truth he received at his mother’s knee, every truth he received in the Sabbath School, every truth he took on hearsay from another. They never were his own. He must see them for himself, and find them convincing to his soul. Then he will have them all back again for his very own, clarified, and enlarged, and enduring. It’s more than likely he may state them in new and startling terms, but, after all, the terms don’t greatly matter.’

Donald, shuddering, confessed himself sore foughten, and utterly hopeless of ever stating any truth in any terms whatsoever. But Fergus Carmichael was undismayed.

‘Dinna be in too great a hurry,’ he advised. ‘But, eh, laddie! give me the man, all the time, who has thought things out for himself, however blundering his mental processes may be, rather than one who just nods assent to the most orthodox propositions to which he has never given a thought. If he’s worth his salt, he’ll find in the long run that his faith does not differ fundamentally from the faith that has uplifted and inspired all sorts o’ humans for generations. That’s something to be going on with . . .’

‘But, if we canna believe any longer in the Bible . . .’ wailed his distraught parishioner.

‘Havers! Ye might as well say: If we canna believe any longer in English literature. . . . The Bible is a whole literature, aye, and a great literature. It’s not a book; it’s a library of sixty-six books, all sorts and conditions. There are tribal traditions, which were handed down from generation to generation by word o’ mouth before writing was ever introduced, just as the Beowulf was handed down.’

If any one else had said this same to Donald Strachan a little earlier, he would have been flirting with physical violence.

‘There are legends of ancient heroes, which were sung at the camp-fires, just like Ossian’s tales o’ Fingal and Sarno and Calgorm and Cathulla, an epoch-making drama . . .’

‘Drama!!’

‘Aye; and books of authentic history, one delightful idyll, a passionate Hebrew love-song . . .’

This last Donald simply took on the word of his spiritual adviser. His brain was reeling. He had no conception in the world to what he was alluding. The Song of Songs, to Donald, was an elaborate, and sometimes sorely strained, allegory of the relation between the Lord and His Church.

‘There’s the temple psalm-book,’ Mr. Carmichael continued in wild-eyed heresy . . . it was wild-eyed heresy to his hearer . . . ‘which grew through generations, and was used in the temple

worship. And there are the works of the great mystics, greater even than Browning and Emerson and Tam Carlyle, all leading up to the Gospel narratives and the letters of them that were nearest to the Master. Search the Scriptures, and never fear but you'll find something you canna help but believe. Ye'll never get a religion out o' the Bible, mind; it's just the other way about.'

Donald shook his head in a bewildered way. He assimilated things slowly, and this was like to be an indigestible ration.

'You're gey jealous for the Word, Donald, I can see . . . which is as it should be; but you can keep an easy mind. The Bible has survived the criticism of a good many years. And, anyhow, it's only our opinion about the Book that is under fire. I held the theory o' verbal inspiration myself for a long time; but, to tell the truth, folk sadly misused it. They would pick out a few passages here and there, as if they were incantations or charms. They would drag a verse out of its context, and apply it to circumstances to which it was never meant to apply. No other book could ever have stood it. Come to think of it, I've a suspicion the Bible is really just coming to its own . . .'

Donald took a deep breath. His heart was curiously in tune with the old man, but there were many inhibitions to be overcome. Some remarks of his father-confessor were already working in him like yeast. That matter of a heavenly sanction for play-acting . . .

‘Aye; but what’s this about a drama?’ . . . Donald was quite stern . . . ‘A drama, ye said! . . . Did I understand you to mean actually . . .’

‘Job,’ said the minister. ‘And a first-rate drama at that. But I’m not going to play the oracle further, nor am I going to enter into controversy with you just now. Go back to your Bible; and read the Book of Isaiah . . . not a few verses of it. Read it, as you would read “Sartor Resartus.” Read it as a coherent whole. You won’t understand the half of it the now; but read the book. Try to get what Isaiah was writing about. Read the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, as you would read a letter from your father in Innerneuk. Don’t just stick to the thirteenth chapter. Read the letter. See what he’s trying to tell you. Above all, read Luke’s version o’ the Gospel. Aye, aye; you’ve read it again and again. But try reading it right through, intelligently, at a sitting, just as you might read any other biographical sketch. Then come to me with your difficulties from time to time, and I’ll give you anything I have. . . . For, oh, my laddie, it’s borne in upon me you have the root of the matter in you, and I’m looking forward most wishfully to officiate at your ordination.’

And Donald went back to his Bible, to read his letters and to read his books, with a strange comforting surmise that he had been, perhaps, unnecessarily alarmed.

It was a dread experience, though. He had still to call on all his courage, and all his moral stamina,

and all his spiritual reserve, to carry him through. He had to work and think, as never before. There were long and earnest discussions with Fergus Carmichael, from which he garnered precious things. The fog persisted, but it thinned a bit. He groped his way through it, monotonously enough, wearily indeed on occasion, but not without hope. And gradually new light broke through. Things began to take shape . . . pillars, arches, dim interiors . . . a whole temple of God, wherein a man might well worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

CHAPTER III

HIS MAIDEN EFFORT

DONALD took the examinations for Master of Arts in a calm and workmanlike fashion, was duly capped, and entered the Theological Hall. There he sat at the feet of giants like George Adam Smith and James Denney, and learned wisdom.

He was now making his way . . . not merely self-supporting, but able to send a little home. It brought him deep satisfaction. There had been little opportunity for that during his four years at Gilmorehill. Twice, in balancing his books, he had come out a bare florin ahead. Of a summer, he had gone home, to work on the little croft at Innerneuk with a queer new enthusiasm. 'Just like any un-gifted orra-man!' his mother protested, though, secretly, she was uplifted with his steadfast homelikeness. In college terms, he had eked out his scanty means by tutoring . . . terrible work! . . . thrusting small rations of Latin and mathematics upon unreceptive minds at half-a-crown an hour. He managed to make ends meet; but there was little enough margin.

Early in his course he had begun to dream of literary triumphs. Any sort of scribbling was in line with his life-work . . . good practice, if nothing more, and fascinating. He wrote anything that occurred to him: poems, short stories, articles.

They seemed first-rate. He would go down to the corner of the street, and pop them into the big red pillar-box. Then it was just as if he raced them back to his lodgings. He got there before them, it is true; but they were never far behind. He made quite a collection of rejection slips, all very polite, but firm; and he was undaunted still.

He drew blood from the *Evening News*.

He overheard a man in a tramway-car ask his companion if he were minded to go to Frame's concert and hae a laugh. Frame, 'The Man You Know,' was the predecessor of Sir Harry Lauder, and a master of mirth.

'I canna see my way,' said the other gravely. 'I've just joined a burial-society.'

All was grist that came to Donald's mill. He made a little paragraph of it for a column called 'Clydeside Echoes'; and, to his delight, it appeared in print. He saw visions and dreamed dreams. The door was ajar at last. No saying to what of fame or fortune it might lead.

The Glasgow *Evening News* paid a penny a line.

He even trifled with the occult. Coleridge had composed 'Kubla Khan' in a dream. R. L. S. got many of his plots in visions of the night. 'The Opium-Eater'...

Could it be that long-dead authors, who had never written themselves out on earth, wandered around seeking a suitable medium through whom to express themselves? On the off-chance, Donald would sit of a night, doggedly trying to gain the

receptive state, the state of pure passivity, resolutely clutching a pencil, sufficient paper before him for a hundred-thousand-word novel. The gas was screwed down to a mere blue peep, and all the world shut out . . . everything made propitious. The chance in a million for an overweighted literary spirit to unburden himself. He had qualms, naturally. Trust your earnest Scot for qualms. Could such an epoch-making work rightly be appropriated? The ethics of the thing eluded him; and the problem militated against his success. It would arise just as he was drifting into the desired comatose condition, with the blatancy of a corncrake, to stab him broad awake. Of course, he might acknowledge indebtedness in a few well-chosen words . . .

It did not matter anyhow, for the wandering authors did not come his way. Either he was not a medium, or there were no disembodied literary spirits in the neighborhood.

But his was a dour soul; and, in the end, by much importunity, he had his heart's desire. A real short story was accepted by *The Bailie*, a quaint Glasgow periodical . . . actually paid for . . . ten shillings, presumably, though Donald never divulged the exact amount. The door stood wide, that he might enter in.

Thereafter, he never looked back. A certain facility came out of his constant practice. His output was taken: little stories for *The Bailie*, the Glasgow *Weekly Herald*, *The Weekly Welcome*. He never

signed his contributions to *The Weekly Welcome*; the name of the paper distressed him . . . unreasonably enough. Execrable stuff; but it brought him anything up to a guinea or so a time. It helped wonderfully.

Furthermore, in the entrance examination to the Theological Hall, he had won another bursary, thirty-three pounds ten shillings a year for four years; and he was now at liberty to try his apprentice hand in any little country pulpit to which he might be invited. There were several sources of income to feed the exchequer. The heart-breaking work of tutoring backward intellects could be abandoned. Donald was making his way.

Appointments to preach came slowly enough at first. Such were dispensed by an official at the Hall, and Donald's only claim to consideration was his gift of the Gaelic. There were others, senior students, who had the Gaelic too. But occasionally he did have the chance to supply some little Highland kirk.

It meant a long railway journey on the Saturday evening, entertainment at the manse over the week-end, two services . . .

'And haply, Maister Strachan, ye'll say a word to the bairns in the Sabbath School.'

Donald was inclined at first to take these words to the bairns lightly and without preparation, but he learned better.

It was on one of his early excursions he began blithely:

‘Now, I’m going to make a few remarks on the catechism. Will any little girl give me the catechism for the day?’

Every hand was at once eagerly raised . . . waggled about, indeed, like a distracted semaphore, to attract attention; and a flaxen-haired child, at a nod, rose triumphantly in her place.

‘Please, sir . . . What is the Seventh Commandment? . . . The Seventh Commandment is: Thou shalt not commit adultery.’

‘We shall pass on to the psalm,’ said Donald.

Then back by an early train to the Hall on Monday. There he must needs run the gauntlet of his critical comrades in official frock-coat and carefully treasured tall silk hat, but the richer for one pound sterling, less the railway fare . . . perhaps about nine shillings and sixpence net, plus experience that was as refined gold.

Donald Strachan will never forget his first appointment.

Infinite labor went into the two sermons required, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. He could never have imagined how hard it was to prepare two sermons. No one can, who has never tried it. He laid down his pen with a groan. The mountain had labored, and brought forth a mouse. This was all of which he was capable. No use deluding himself in the matter. And he doubted if his *magnum opus* would run beyond thirty minutes. Donald had ever a profound contempt for twenty-minute discourses. Yet he felt he

could not add a sentence if his life depended on it. He had not merely exhausted his chosen topics. Every scrap of philosophy and every scrap of theology he possessed, not to mention two quotations from Carlyle and one from Browning, had gone into these puny discourses. He saw no possibility of ever writing a third. He was empty.

With shuddering awe he gazed into a future that would demand of him two sermons every Sabbath day, and prayers, and a Bible Class address, a discourse for the week-night service, addresses here, there, and everywhere . . . say, twenty thousand words a week, something like the equivalent of a good-sized volume every month.

‘Preserve us!’

Then he had to think of all the little outside societies that would be demanding of him extra addresses and lectures, light-heartedly, as if such things were veriest trifles to be tossed off on the spur of the moment. It is not right and fair. The mere thought of it crushed his spirit. Why is it that a public speaker should be at the beck and call of all and sundry, expected to give them freely and without stint of heart and brain effort? They would not ask it, and expect it, of a doctor that he should spend his leisure hours prescribing for their ailments just in a friendly way, or even of a plumber that he should tinker with their pipes at any time out of the goodness of his heart. The whole task seemed preposterous . . . impossible! Yet men have accomplished it.

Great souls of the past, who had been wont to turn the hourglass in the pulpit, came to mock his futility. In these gray hours there seemed nothing for it but the old croft among the hills again . . . Defeat! . . . God!

When strength came back to him, he read and re-read his sermons, over and over again, laboriously getting them by rote. He would never dare to face a congregation for the first time without paper; but he must present as near an approach to extemporaneous preaching as was possible. How the time dragged! Always, the clock seemed to stand still the while he read . . . or, at least, it must have paused for a few minutes. Still, the morning discourse, if he delivered it slowly and impressively, with dramatic pauses, might be spun out to thirty minutes. The evening service was not so important. In one moment of particularly deep humility he was convinced that no one would come to the evening service at all.

Well, he must do his best. Angels can do no more.

The great occasion arrived. And Donald chose long psalms to sing . . . 'We shall sing all the stanzas' . . . and read an extra long chapter.

Had he but known it, his prayer was sufficient, though, of course, if he had known it, it never could have been. Donald had the gift of prayer even then. Once his eyes were closed, and the sea of upturned faces shut out, he was just a shepherd-boy again among the Grampians, of the lineage of the shepherd-boy of Bethlehem. He was alone with

God, and he told Him all his heart. It would have amazed him to know how many hearts were in tune with his, uplifted and strengthened and renewed. For a man does not go to the consecrated place to hear a sermon. He goes to remind himself of God, to get away for a spell from the commonplace and the sordid, to find a larger horizon, to revise his estimates of the wise and the foolish, the worthy and the mean, to get back into tune with the Infinite . . . all sorts of things. What on earth does the sermon matter? It is merely incidental. But then, Donald did not know . . .

The fatal time had come.

He gave out his text, and waited till every last one in the congregation had turned it up. Under his searching eye every one had, perforce, to turn it up. But it was from Isaiah, and they found it all too easily. He regretted a little he had not chosen from some elusive book like Nehemiah or Joel. He repeated it twice, and cleared his throat. He noted the face of the clock in the front of the wee gallery, leering at him between its hands. Then he lost his head altogether.

Discretion went to the winds.

Deliberation . . . dramatic pauses . . . histrionic gestures? . . . Absurd!

He sprinted through his sermon, just as if he were at last beyond the half-backs, through the backs, and headed straight for goal. Nothing could stop him now. A magnificent effort. He was perspiring freely, and his heart was pounding. It is

doubtful if any one in the congregation gathered what he was talking about; but they never took their eyes off him. They were fascinated. If they had not been in the kirk, they might have cheered themselves hoarse. That was the way it affected them.

He turned the last page of the manuscript. The boldly written Amen was staring him in the face. He glanced again at the clock... and his heart stopped beating.

Ten minutes!... And only just!!

The dramatic pause arrived. For a moment he stared with open mouth. He could scarce believe his eyes. But it is in such moments of stress the inspiration comes. The pause was not unduly prolonged. The whole manuscript was deftly whisked over, and he began at the beginning again, a little clammy, but strangely calm.

He had even the nerve to interpolate here and there:

‘As I have already remarked...’

Or, ‘Let me repeat...’

Donald was finding himself.

‘And didn’t any one ever notice it?’ I have asked him in awe.

‘I dinna ken,’ he said. ‘I never heard. But, my sakes! folk are very very long-suffering entities.’

Yet it was not for this tautological discourse that Donald Strachan was long remembered in the manse of Whippledreich, though the truth of the matter he learned only long afterwards, and that

from the minister himself in an expansive moment at the Edinburgh Assembly.

On arrival, Donald had been duly shooed into the study out of the way, there, presumably, to meditate upon his sermons; and suppertime was at hand when the bit servant lassie broke in upon the lady of the manse with evident consternation.

‘Losh, mum! . . .’

Her mistress gently reproved her.

‘Jean, you must never use such a word in the manse. “Losh” is profane swearing.’

‘Ye don’t say so, Mistress McGregor? . . . Losh! . . . I mean to say, I’m sorry, mum. I never can mind.’

‘All right.’ Mrs. McGregor brightly nodded encouragement to the perturbed waif. ‘Tell me all about it.’

And, like a bombshell, the news burst.

‘The meenister’s broughten nae nicht-shirt!’

‘No night-shirt?’

‘Nae luggage ava.’

The lady of the manse was a little aghast. What manner of man was this that had descended upon them? She feared the worst; but, smilingly, she must needs strive to cover up her guest’s delinquencies.

‘Possibly he left it on the train.’

Jean readily admitted the possibility.

‘That’ll be it. Preachers are aye the feckless, absent-minded bodies . . .’

‘Jean!’

'Askin' your pardon, mum,' said Jean hurriedly. 'I meant the green anes they send frae place to place. . . . But there's no sayin' whaur the luggage'll be by now. What's to be done? . . . Wull I lay oot ane o' the maister's?'

'It might be as well.'

'Imphm!'

And the servant lassie hasted upon her errand of mercy.

Donald accepted the situation precisely as he found it. He made no comment either of surprise or gratitude. He never mentioned his luggage. The loss of it, apparently, was neither here nor there. But, on Monday morning, he made his appearance for an early breakfast with the borrowed gray flannel night-shirt grotesquely draped over his arm.

For a moment, his hostess took it for granted he was about to return the thing . . . somewhat ostentatiously, it seemed to her . . . with belated thanks. But not Donald.

'Excuse me,' he bashfully addressed her; 'but do you think I might bother you for a bit o' brown paper and a string?'

'Oh, just leave it,' she said. 'No need for you to trouble about it.'

Donald stared, as if the very idea were repugnant to him.

'Leave it! What for should I leave it? . . . No, no; I maun take it along with me.'

He had all the air of one who firmly withstands a subtle defrauder.

The mistress of the manse, at this point, should have put her foot down firmly. As a matter of fact, she was really too astounded to be capable of anything save the meek production of a sheet of brown paper and a ball of twine. Whereat Donald solemnly parceled up the night-shirt before her very eyes, ate a hasty breakfast, tucked the brown paper parcel under his arm, and, with fervent thanks for all kindness received, marched off to the station.

‘Well, I never!’ said Mrs. McGregor.

Jean, taken into the lady’s confidence, grew quite hot over the matter. She felt a real proprietary interest in the equipment of the manse. Was all for dashing forthwith to the station, in hopes that the train might be late and the booty retrievable by storm. Her mistress gently restrained her.

‘T’k, t’k! Ye’re soft mum,’ she said reproachfully. ‘My conscience! What’ll the maister say? . . . It was almost split new. . . . An’ him a preacher! . . . But the Lord helps them as help theirsels, they say. I never heard the like.’

‘Nor I,’ admitted Mrs. McGregor. ‘I can’t make head nor tail of it.’

‘The best nicht-shirt in the drawer!’ Jean lamented. ‘I wisht noo I’d given him the auld ane that shrunk.’

‘Ah, well!’ said the lady. ‘It can’t be helped now.’

When the minister returned, however, a few hours later, he was by no means so complacent.

‘He may be an absent-minded beggar,’ said he,

giving his errant substitute the benefit of the doubt; 'but he's not going to get away with my night-shirt.'

And he wrote Donald a fiery epistle, demanding the instant return of his property.

In due course, he received a reply. It was about two parts mystification and one of Christian admonition, the whole strongly seasoned with righteous indignation, and served up piping hot. It seemed to convey the idea that a clamant injustice had been perpetrated, though, just possibly, it might be of misunderstanding; that, doubtless, in course of time, when it was all explained, the minister of Whippledreich would be duly ashamed of himself . . . as well he might be; that, when such time arrived, he must console himself with the assurance that Donald Strachan was striving to bear him no ill-will.

It ran to some four pages. Night-shirt was never mentioned.

'The man's clean daft,' the reader summed it up; and, with a sigh, he abandoned all hope of ever recovering his property.

But Donald was not daft. Indeed, he had really had some ground for indignation.

At the end of the week, a Jumble Sale took place in the Whippledreich Kirk hall in aid of the Dorcas Society; and, as the ladies of the committee set forth the articles that had been contributed, some one discovered a little brown paper parcel for which no one could account.

‘Probably an anonymous donation,’ said Mrs. McGregor lightly. ‘Open it up.’

But, even as she spoke, something seemed to warn her that all was not well . . . some breathless sense of close discovery. She had seen just such a parcel not so very long before. It was the way it was done up . . . a signature in itself. It was distinctive.

Spellbound, she gazed until it was opened; and then her soul melted within her.

‘Poor laddie!’ she exclaimed, with laughter that was akin to tears.

For there was disclosed to sight a gray flannel nightshirt, not unlike the minister’s property which Donald had appropriated in so high-handed a fashion. She understood.

Poor Donald had never owned such a luxury as reputable hand-baggage. He was still sailing far too close to the wind for that. He had neither suitcase nor Gladstone bag. His way was just to wrap up a night-shirt in a bit of brown paper, pocket a razor, comb, and toothbrush, and start out. Thus equipped, he had arrived at Whippledreich.

But people were leaving parcels of clothing at the manse that day for the Jumble Sale; and, of course, no one could ever have recognized in the little brown paper parcel, which Donald had humbly deposited on the lobby table, the sole luggage of a visiting clergyman. His had just been swept away with the rest.

So Donald’s prophecy came true, and the Rev-

erend James McGregor was duly ashamed of himself for all aspersions cast upon the character of his guest . . . as well he might be. But, as fair exchange is no robbery, he saw no immediate reason to reopen the subject.

CHAPTER IV

NOVITIATE

(I)

FROM month to month, Donald went forth, here, there, and everywhere, like any knight-crusader, to new adventures, eager about his craft, open-eyed and open-hearted, and ever ready to profit by any mischance.

In friction with his kind, his rougher corners were smoothed down. He gained experience. He achieved poise. He was entertained in cot and mansion. He learned of women and men.

There was a little Victorian aristocrat with corkscrew curls, who put the fear of death in him by her first words on the threshold of her home:

‘Mr. Strachan, tell me at once, do you smoke?’

Donald reluctantly admitted that he did . . . was prepared to abandon the vicious habit for the time being, but . . . yes, he smoked.

Whereat she took him to her heart, conducted him in triumph to a vast conservatory, and invited him to exert his lethal influence on the green fly. Sat chatting with him there, undaunted by the pungent blue clouds he wove at her behest, and praised him for their very greatness and intensity. Egged him on to undreamed-of excesses. Donald just about smoked himself faint in the good cause.

There was really nothing very formidable about her. The old lady and Donald speedily became fast friends.

And there was a sonsie country-woman, who entertained him in state in the best room of a commodious farmhouse till she could stand it no longer.

Suddenly, she unbosomed herself.

‘Megsty me! It’s ower cauld to be genteel. Let’s awa’ ben to the kitchen.’

And to the kitchen, with its solid comfort, they forthwith repaired.

He drew naturally to folk of all types, being inherently towardly himself; and they responded after their fashion. Decent, good-natured sort of place the world was! The somewhat bewildered expression he had acquired on leaving Innerneuk slowly faded. He was at home with humankind.

But, besides that, he began to feel at home in the kirk.

There was an occasion when the beadle was taken sick just as the kirk was going in, and Donald had, perforce, to find his way into a strange pulpit without an accredited guide. That was in Girvan. As he ascended the stair, he found the door of the little box-pulpit securely fastened, and he could not, for the life of him, discover how it opened. No doorknob disturbed the smooth symmetry of the thing. There must have been a hidden catch. He felt the breathless anxiety of the waiting congregation. It was no time for prolonged fiddling.

Grasping the pulpit gown with one hand, he girded up his loins, and clambered over. The assembled worshipers gasped in amazement.

Later, opinion was divided as to the proper comportment of a minister in such a situation; but, in any case, it was a most unseemly spectacle.

‘He that entereth not by the door, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.’

The way they regarded the Bible in those days, any verse could be wrenched from its setting and used as a missile.

Donald was, in this matter at least, no thief or robber, but an earnest workman, who realized that he had a task to perform, and was learning to go about it in a masterful straightforward way, whether or not he must needs trample rough-shod over the conventions. A trifling thing at first sight, but wondrously revealing. Nothing is more hemmed in with conventions and a sort of false decorum than a religious service, just as nothing is more apt to be hidebound by tradition than religious doctrine. A man has not yet come to his own who can be barred from the rostrum by the mere matter of a closed door, or, indeed, hampered in the delivery of his message by any fear of adverse comment from his hearers.

Donald Strachan was no longer performing before people, as an elocutionist or a public entertainer performs before people. He was no mere lecturer, versed in Hebrew lore, who was prepared

to interest and instruct an audience with description of foreign parts and ancient customs. He had more affinity with the doctor who gravely tells a man of matters of vital importance to him, personally . . . matters touching life and death. He was learning to talk quite sincerely to his hearers, as he might talk to them individually in the street or in the study. How he reached the appointed place from which to talk, and how he appeared in the eyes of men when he had reached it, were minor matters altogether. He knew what he had to say, and he was going to say it frankly, as man to man. That is preaching. Already he had abandoned the use of notes.

Why! on one occasion at least, he was actually seen to laugh in the pulpit. Why should a preacher not laugh, if it be necessary?

He had just noticed a small boy in the front of the gallery trying to drop a peppermint lozenge into the open mouth of one who slept below. It was grotesque enough to make any one laugh. But, of course, he improved the occasion. Despite his sense of humor, he was of the apostolic succession; and he was still very young. Later on, he might have told himself that the drowsy soul was perhaps a baker who had been up all night.

The sleeper awoke on the impact of the lozenge; and Donald, having mastered his feelings, took occasion to remind him gently of a young man, Eutychus, who sat on a window-sill during a lengthy discourse of the Apostle Paul, and, falling

asleep, tumbled into the court below and broke his neck.

'Ye'll find it in the Acts o' the Apostles, chapter twenty. And, mind, in saying this, I am not preferring any apology for the length of my sermon.'

He added a word of reproof to the youngster, and the incident was closed.

'Noo, we shall return in all seriousness to the matter under discussion . . .'

A human soul.

He often made mistakes in the pulpit, but he did not allow them to put him about any more than a slip of the tongue in ordinary conversation. He had the usual psychological vagaries of the public speaker. Once on a time, as he preached to a somewhat dull audience, framing his phrases as he went, he was just about to insist that, if they had not acquired something-or-other in character, they could not pass muster . . .

In the very speaking of the sentence, it flashed across his brain, as such things will, how quaint and arresting it would be if by mistake he should say, ' . . . pass the mustard . . .'

And out it came, of course, automatically, but gravely and impressively, to Donald's dismay.

'You . . . cannot . . . pass . . . the mustard.'

For a moment he glared around, to see if any one would have the temerity to smile. Not a smile dawned on any face; but a curious alertness obtained throughout the rest of the service.

And there was a day when he preached a moving

sermon on Elisha, and got him horribly and hopelessly and inexplicably mixed up with Elijah. That must have wrung his soul. But the mix-up did not matter in the least. The lesson he intended to emphasize was admirable.

Donald was a humble soul, but very jealous for the purity of the public worship he was called to conduct. He was not long in discovering that a minister must needs assert himself on occasion if the service is to be carried through in accordance with his ideals. The final authority must be vested in some one, and it is only right that it should be in the officiating clergyman. It sometimes takes firmness to impress this upon the presumptuous.

It was in 'pleading the scheme' that he first ran counter to somewhat lax use and wont, and found himself for the first time taking a sturdy grip on the reins. His knees went shaky a bit; but his heart was entirely undaunted, though principalities and powers were ranged against him.

Each second-year theological student must give up a certain proportion of his Sabbaths to laying before various congregations in Scotland the chosen scheme of missionary enterprise for the year . . . pleading the cause of the mission field that seems most needy and deserving at the time. Pulpits are thrown open to these youths, and they tell the people all about it. They have studied up the subject, and gotten the facts at their finger ends. It gives a wonderful stimulus to missionary interest, both in pulpit and pew.

‘A special collection will be taken on retiring.’

If a fee is forthcoming for the preacher, half of it is conscientiously placed in the collection plate. There is a tradition in these matters.

For the pleading of the scheme, a great and fashionable Glasgow church was allotted to Donald Strachan, a magnificent edifice, the church of the wealthy shipbuilders and shipowners; and, on the Sabbath appointed, he was there in the vestry, a mere Highland student, somewhat perturbed, but well-prepared and grimly set upon his duty.

The church bells were ringing, and the hour of service was at hand, when the door opened, and a majestic individual entered, who announced himself as the Director of Musical Service, and regarded the rugged pulpit-supply obviously with anything but awe.

Donald was impressed. Precentors were familiar to him, and he had encountered organists; but he had never heard of a director of musical service.

Without preamble, his visitor tendered him a small slip of paper.

‘This,’ he said, ‘is the list of the hymns I have chosen for the day.’

And he turned to go.

It was the way he had dealt for years, Sabbath by Sabbath, with the compliant easy-going incumbent he had been appointed to aid in the matter of worship.

Donald pulled himself together. It took an effort, but he was not going to knuckle down to this

sort of thing. He had arranged the service himself to the last least detail. He had spent a lot of time and thought on it. He always did. The chapters to be read, and the psalms to be sung, and the discourse to be delivered must all fit together into one splendid organic unity. This is what a service ought to be. He held strong views on the matter.

‘Bide a wee, man,’ he begged him. When Donald was in any way disturbed, such refined English as he had acquired was apt to fall away from him like a garment. ‘At least, let’s see what the hymns are.’

He seized the hymn-book. The organist paused, amused, at the door.

‘Not that I hold wi’ man-made hymns to any great extent, but the old order changeth... Um-m-m-m... What’s this?... “The roseate hues of early dawn, the brightness of the day...” I might’ve guessed. Aye, aye; very pretty, doubtless, but gey inappropriate. Hasn’t any one ever told you this is a missionary Sabbath?... Or did ye just forget?... Now, let’s see... Number three, thirty-five... Um-m... “O Paradise, O Paradise, who doth not crave for rest?”’

Donald glanced up whimsically at the chooser of hymns.

‘Aye,’ he said; ‘and if the folk got an inkling their craving was like to be suddenly satisfied, what then?... I’m thinkin’ some might be considerably discomposed. Man, I’m surprised at ’ee. It’s no just fair to put these words in their mouths

... No, no; Paradise maun e'en wait a bit, till we do the task appointed to us here on earth. See here ... we shall sing a part of the twenty-fourth psalm, to the tune of "Saint George's, Edinburgh." Yon's a grand rousin' tune ... "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King o' Glory shall come in." And ... and psalm number seventy-two: "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." Then, if ye must have a hymn, what about: "From Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strand"? ...'

But the organist had groaned, and gone.

'Oho, my birkie!' quoth Donald. 'I'll sort ye.'

He was not sure, at the moment, just how.

In due course he announced from the pulpit to the assembled multitude:

'We shall join together in the public worship o' God by singing to His praise psalm number twenty-four, from the seventh verse to the end.'

The congregation stared at him in evident astonishment.

'Ye gates, lift up your heads on high;
ye doors that last for aye,
Be lifted up, that so the King
of glory enter may.'

'Psalm number twenty-four, from the seventh verse to the end. The tune is "Saint George's, Edinburgh."'

And the organ at once gave forth the beautiful strains of 'The roseate hues of early dawn.'

It was only then that Donald discovered the little notice-board which displayed the numbers of the hymns to be sung; and they were the numbers which the organist had chosen.

Donald sighed. Things must be done decently and in order; but he was in charge of the service, and it was going to be a missionary service.

The roseate hues, and all that they had suggested to a poet soul, having been duly hymned, the Amen was added; and with a rustle the congregation resumed their seats. The organist smiled triumphantly, and turned up 'O Paradise! O Paradise!' in his hymn-book. He had carried his point in a quiet and dignified fashion, and, doubtless, taught this callow intruder a much-needed lesson. Already he had his hands upon the stops in preparation for the next number, which should drive the lesson home, when a jarring note was introduced. The campaign was not working out precisely in accordance with plan. He had a curious feeling that something had gone wrong. A prayer was indicated on the programme; but the preacher was actually reading aloud the twenty-fourth psalm, and he read it magnificently to the very end. There seemed something offensively sacrilegious about such an arbitrary departure from the prescribed order of service. Such a thing had never happened before. It made a man wonder what next.

As it turned out, the organist had leisure in which to indulge his wonder. For, thereafter, until the benediction was pronounced, the organ was

mute. It was simply ignored. The well-paid choir sat idly, with folded hands. The anthems they had practiced assiduously on Friday night were never sung. The organist fidgeted on his seat, but was helpless before the rude straightforward methods of Donald Strachan. Of course, he might have burst in at any moment with full organ, and drowned out the preacher; but it is not done. There is a limit to the daring even of a director of musical service. And there was no saying how this eccentric person in the pulpit might counter-attack. The organist, for the first time in a masterful career, was actually cowed. The elaborate musical service went to the winds. The sophisticated Glasgow congregation might have been worshipping in some rude little Highland conventicle, save only that, instead of singing the Psalms of David, they listened the while Donald read them.

And how they listened! Just as a minister sometimes dreams of persuading folk to listen. Never a one but got forward on the edge of his pew, and put his whole being into it. No preacher could have desired, or imagined, more rapt attention. And he preached for forty-five minutes by the clock.

Donald had come to his own.

Moreover, his methods were approved. The congregation approved them. Great men slipped round to the vestry to shake the preacher by the hand, and tell him they had never gotten more out of a service, and to express the hope that they might be privileged to hear him again. Never a

suggestion of criticism. Never a word of rebuke.

A rugged captain of industry, who had just dealt, in no spirit of compromise, with an ugly strike in the shipyards, gazed a moment into the eyes of the Highland student.

'Perrfect!' said he.

Deep calling unto deep.

Glasgow columnists were enchanted. The *Evening News* dealt favorably with the matter in 'Clydeside Echoes,' and the *Times* mentioned it with a chuckle in 'Gossip and Grumbles.' Even the Faculty approved . . . unofficially.

The collection was stupendous.

(2)

There are three types of preachers: those to whom you cannot listen; those to whom, with some effort, you may listen; and those to whom you just have to listen.

Donald Strachan was no orator, but he was sincere. He had fought for his faith, and achieved it; and he compelled people to hear him. Laboriously enough, he had produced a few sermons, solid, meaty sermons, on which he could depend in his itinerant work. Such are known to the flippant as 'gallopers,' but Donald never regarded them irreverently. They were the fruit of heart and brain effort. They were his message, in the name of his God, to the world at large.

And gradually he was acquiring some mastery of the technique of preaching.

Daily, after college hours, he and a few kindred souls would repair to Kunzle's tea-shop on Sauchiehall Street, and turn it into a forum. There, having gravely discussed the respective merits of Log Cabin and Arcadia Mixture as smoking-tobacco, they would stuff their pipes with the weed approved, and swap ideas and texts...aye, winnow these ideas, and get the wheat properly separated from the chaff by much argumentative agitation.

They abjured altogether the merely sensational; but they loved the arresting out-of-the-way text... something to compel the attention at the outset. Thereafter, of course, it devolves upon the speaker to see to it that the attention does not stray. Their discussions made for a certain communism in sermons, but a real gain in breadth of view and depth of insight.

Each one of them, for instance, had a discourse on one Jehoiakim, who cut up the sacred roll of the prophet Jeremiah with a penknife, and tossed the fragments contemptuously on a brazier. Could anything have been more timely? It led up to a searching examination of the Higher Criticism, and a powerful discussion of the attitude of men to the Word of God. In many little Scottish villages, Jehoiakim leapt suddenly out of his obscurity and became for the time notorious.

It is credibly reported, too, that, years later, three Glasgow probationers, preaching for the vacancy of Montrose, on three successive Sabbaths

preached three perfectly good sermons on Mordecai's sublime appeal to Queen Esther: 'Who knoweth whether thou art come to thy kingdom for such a time as this?' The last of the three found his congregation somewhat restive, even darkly suspicious, and the kirk eventually went to a candidate from Aberdeen who had the daring originality to find his text elsewhere.

It was Donald who discovered: 'Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish, *and he paid the fare thereof.*' Aye, when a man flees away from right and duty, he has to pay, and that to the uttermost farthing . . . far more than he had ever anticipated when he planned out his trip. You see the possibilities at once.

Strange little whimsies, that did not detract in the least from the sincerity of these young prophets.

At all events, the time was ripe at last for Donald Strachan to make the acquaintance of Ardarroch; and Ardarroch was a place after his own heart.

He little knew how much it held in store for him of comfort and inspiration and excitement and heartache and rapture. He simply went to supply on a Sabbath for a minister who was assisting at a communion in another village; but he had scarce arrived when something told him: 'This is home.' He was more than willing to believe it.

Ardarroch is a bonnie bit clachan lying at the head of one of the peaceful wee lochs the sea thrusts up tentatively into Argyllshire. As the

stout little paddle-steamer, churning its way down the Firth of Clyde, rounded the point and opened out the loch, Donald had his first glimpse of the place: a handful of whitewashed and thatched cottages sweeping crescentwise on both sides of the pier . . . you could almost smell the roses that clustered about them; two little gray churches, and Auld Kirk and the Free Kirk, pointing their symbolic steeples toward heaven; a homely patchwork of small fields spread in the background; and, above all, the heather-clad Tor standing as if in eternal vigil. The squawk of a hen came distinctly across the water, and a cow raised her voice in sonorous welcome. A winsome place.

The adherents of the Free Kirk, as every Scotsman knows, had come forth from the Auld Kirk at the great Disruption of 1843, refusing any longer to comply with the dictates of State or to have undesirable ministers thrust upon them by the wealthy landowners. The Scots have little patience in such matters. Awful tales were told of the sort of men who were, whiles, foisted on God-fearing communities.

And for fifty years the Free Kirk had patiently awaited the purification of the Auld Kirk, but all in vain. Adherents of the two might be sociable and friendly all the week, but of a Sabbath day they must needs pass one another as if they had never met. It was stimulating and fortifying to do this . . . almost like a confession of faith.

The United Presbyterians, be it said, were

another offshoot of the Auld Kirk, but there were none of these in Ardarroch.

The U.P.s were going to stir Ardarroch to its very foundations, split the community as with seismic shock, move douce gentle-mannered folk to club their friends about the head, and sneak out in the night with incendiary ambitions, and defy the law of the land at the point of a hay-fork. Almost incredible! But, when Donald Strachan first preached there, all was peace. There was no hint of the approaching turmoil.

Of a Sabbath morning the country-folk went along to their respective churches inevitably, a slow-moving procession, with brave display of Sunday blacks and best bonnets, just as they had always done, just as their fathers and mothers had done before them. The very squeak of the bairns' shoes was solemnizing.

The Free Kirk, in which he preached, was precisely as it had been for fifty years.

There was no organ, of course.

'Ye never can worship God,' Miss Mirren Leitch would say, 'wi' a kist o' whustles.'

Such a remark was regarded as withering and final.

Whether, in worshipping God with the human voice, even a chest of whistles may not be of some service, at least in keeping the worshiper on the right key and aiding him to the giving of his very best, was a question which simply did not arise. If it had arisen, Mirren would doubtless have made short work of it.

No stained-glass windows introduced the slightest taint of Popery. No carving broke the Second Commandment of the Decalogue. No cushions relieved the uncompromising austerity of the pews. Nor was there any provision for heating the place in winter. Often, there must have been a real sepulchral chill about it, but . . .

‘If the divine fire in the heart canna keep a man warm, he maun be sadly lost to grace.’

The Free Kirk was ever distinguished by its rugged simplicity and purity of worship.

There were no flowers save the golden laburnum God Himself proffered through the open windows.

‘That la-burnn-’m!’ Farmer Sneddon used to say, lingering on the ‘burnn-’m’ with just a suggestion of eternal punishment. ‘It ought to be cuttit doon. It distracts the senses to the detriment o’ the soul.’

An occasional sibilant whisper among the waiting worshipers, and the rhythmic invitation of the church bell, did not break, but only enhanced, the solemn stillness . . . a great and wonderful and pregnant stillness, with which the folk were compassed and veritably rapt from the secular world.

Time and again, there came the scrunch of the gravel outside; then a subdued greeting to the elder at the door, the thump and squeak of stout tackety boots on the naked floor; and the complaint of a pew suddenly burdened with a heavy body; a deep sigh, and the stillness again whelmed all like a flood.

The bell ended in a little flurry, like a runner making a supreme effort at the winning-post, and there was a pause, when even breathing seemed to be suspended. The door beside the pulpit creaked, and Peter McAllister, the souter or cobbler, entered, bearing before him the big pulpit Bible and Psalm-Book. He had already satisfied himself surreptitiously that there was no written sermon concealed in the Bible. The souter combined the duties of beadle and precentor . . . eight pounds a year, paid quarterly . . . thereby attaching to himself an almost intolerable prestige.

He placed the Bible and Psalm-Book squarely in the middle of the pulpit desk, and, returning to the door, held it open. Donald Strachan entered, gathering up the gown a little in one hand, lest he should trip over it in ascending the stair. James Gregg, who was a small man, had on one terrible occasion stepped back to the pulpit seat with one heel on the edge of the gown, and the result had been disastrous. No gown could be trusted unreservedly after that.

Then Lang Peter shut the minister in, softly closed the vestry door, and, with cat-like stealth, took his place in the precentor's box before the pulpit.

Donald arose.

'We shall unite in prayer.'

The whole congregation arose, and stood with bowed heads. They still stood at prayer, and sat to sing, in Ardarroch.

Donald did not plead with God to come down and join them there. He just prayed, very humbly and reverently, that the waiting people might have the purity of vision to realize that God was actually there in their midst... that naught of evil might enter into their communion, nor any unworthy desire distract them. He never thought of God as one who must needs be entreated for good; but he did always try to bring himself and his fellow-worshippers into that receptive mood in which God might have His way with them. And his prayer was answered. Few there but must needs feel they were upon holy ground.

Then they sang one of the psalms, which every one there firmly believed to have been composed from first to last by David, the shepherd-king of Israel... without being greatly the worse for the belief.

This was Lang Peter McAllister's time of anxiety. He had been chosen precentor because he had a good pipe; and he must use no artificial support. Even a tuning-fork would have savored of instrumental music.

Peter arose, and picked a note out of the gamut at random, hummed up the scale as far as he could go, and down the scale as far as he could go, and back again, till he reached a point in his chromatic wandering that attracted him; and there he paused. I have never known just upon what principle he decided on his keynote. It seemed all at hap-hazard, yet there was so much depended on it. If

it were too lofty, then, in the high notes of the psalm, he must needs drop a sudden octave, while Miss Turnbull, who could outsoar him some six notes, and knew it, shrilled away at the real tune with solemn triumph in her eye. If he started too low, then Colin Urquhart, who never seemed to come above the surface anyhow, would carry out the composer's intention, to Souter McAllister's confusion, with a sepulchral bellow.

There were other pitfalls just yawning for him, too, if he did not mind his step. It was so easy to start a psalm in common meter to an alluring long-measure tune like 'Warrington.' He had only to relax his vigilance a moment, and something like that was bound to happen. Then, whenever he reached the end of a short line, he had still two notes of the tune in hand, and the last word of the line had to be stretched over these extra notes, like a bit of elastic. The whole congregation would lower their books every time they assisted in this grotesque elongation, and eye him with withering reproach.

But, on the whole, Peter did very well.

The collection was taken just before the third psalm. This was Colin Urquhart's opportunity. He solemnly arose, and produced a ladle that looked rather like a cigar-box on the end of a broom-handle, with a little velvet bag hanging underneath. Skipping the empty pews in front, Colin passed the ladle along the first line of worshipers, picked the coppers out of it, announced in pon-

derous diapason to the church at large: 'Pew number seeven, has contributed thruppence ha' penny,' or whatever it was, dropped the coppers into the little velvet bag, and carried on.

If one happened to be alone in the pew, it was very distressing.

When the benediction had been pronounced, and the kirk skailed, a few of the worshipers still remained in their seats, and a few, who had been waiting patiently at the kirk door, entered, and solemnly took their places near the front . . . old folk, with faces like russet apples, and a way of cupping their ears with horny hands the while they listened. To these Donald repeated the gist of his discourse in the Gaelic, and grappled them to his soul with hoops of steel. The service was at an end.

'A maist promisin' probationer!' they ventured.

Or, 'A wise-like lad!'

Or, 'Aye, aye; he has the root o' the matter in him.'

CHAPTER V

THE PRECENTOR'S LASS

ARDARROCH filled Donald Strachan with a great wistfulness. In Glasgow he was a stranger in a strange land; but here were his kindred kind . . . almost, as it were, his ain folk. He felt that he knew these stolid farmers and hen-wives, the hill-crofters and the herds, the fisher-folk who came straight from their nets to hear the Word of God, as they had come long ago in distant Galilee. He knew their interests, and their shortcomings, and their needs. He respected their virtues. He spoke their language. He knew the dust-brown, kilted laddies, too, soft-spoken, unsophisticated, diffident, with a pleasing knowledge of guddling pools and linties. They might have been his own play-mates back there in Innerneuk.

Of course, he had been to other villages in his itinerant preaching, delightful little villages, which might well have sufficed him. But Ardarroch suddenly kindled in his breast a new emotion he could not ignore. Thereupon, it stood out from among all the villages in the land, shining, distinctive, alone . . . just as a maid will suddenly become to a man the one maid in all a world.

He began already to feel a proprietary interest; and he could not, for the life of him, forbear to take a stroll in the late afternoon, as though to spy

out the land. He knew well it was taking a chance to do such a thing there on the Sabbath day. He knew there were folk, likely enough, prepared to tell him it would utterly destroy his usefulness. But he was not staying at the manse. The minister had taken his wife with him, and Donald had been put up in the hotel at Craigieness. He could avoid the village itself, and it was aye possible to quote Mark two and twenty-three, if there were objectors.

Thus it was, he was able to bear away with him, and treasure throughout the intervening years, sustaining visions of the giant Tor, with the scars the burns had torn showing like faint blue tracer-ies; the Fairy Dell, with the cool murmur of running water among the hart's-tongue ferns; the fragrance that was Honeysuckle Lane . . . fragrance of creamy spires of meadow-sweet, and young bog-myrtle, and trefoil, and honeysuckle . . . great climbing patches of honeysuckle; the gorgeous fuchsias, humming with bees that scarce broke the sun-hot silence. These were visions to hold fast . . . sustaining visions that might well lift a man above himself when he returned to preach on trial.

And thus it was he made the acquaintance of Morag McAllister, the precentor's lass.

He had seen her in the kirk, a lonely little figure, almost supernaturally solemn. Her mother was dead; and her father, of course, had his official rostrum. He heard her voice singing in the psalms, a sweet young voice that sang its way into the

heart of him. For Donald loved bairns, and lonely bairns beyond all.

He came upon her, where the Lade Burn runs down by Ballymenach, seated on a stone, dabbling her bare feet in the stream. She would be about twelve years of age, a shy, wild, elfin thing, of the pure Scots peasant type he admired, with clear gray eyes, high cheek-bones, and the snub nose of fierce independence. Her long bare legs were midge-bitten, nettle-stung, and thorn-scratched, precisely as such legs should be. Her nose was alluringly peppered with freckles . . . 'Fernitickles' she would have called them herself, without distaste. A raven mist of hair was about her head, and there was that in her eyes which bade fair to take her far from the sleepy little clachan that had given her birth.

Also, there were traces of tears. It was not in Donald to pass her by.

There is something unnecessarily pathetic about a child in tears which always stirred him to fierce resentment. It is so easy to remember that a child's grief is out of all proportion to the cause of it, so easy to give a child pleasure, so easy to understand a child. Of course, Donald was not so very old himself at the time . . . twenty-two or thereabouts; but he never thought on that. He just had no patience with those who had forgotten what it felt like . . . lost all memory of their own early ecstasies and tribulations. Any little one could steal up to his heart, and to win the approval of such he

held an achievement. Except ye become as one of these, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God.

Somehow, Donald managed to win the confidence of this untowardly fay. Possibly it was by virtue of his own shortcomings. The mere fact of a preacher being out of doors on the Sabbath day for any purpose other than preaching was enough to soften Morag. It was vastly humanizing. It created a common bond, for she was herself breaking prison at the moment. Personally, she hated the Sabbath day. It was a day of wrath. This particular Sabbath day had been a day of wrath and judgment.

‘That’s a fine strategic position ye’ve got for a warm afternoon,’ Donald began, and he smiled on her as though he had known her all his life.

Morag eyed him in her own detached way, but without resentment. She was not unconscious of the smile.

‘Think ye there’s room for another?’

Morag at once made room upon the stone. At the moment, she could have thought of no other for whom she would have done the same.

Donald tramped carelessly through the shallows, and paused before her.

‘I’m Donald Strachan,’ he said.

‘I ken,’ said the maiden. ‘I’m Morag, the precentor’s lass. I was in the kirk the morn, when you preached.’

Donald nodded gravely.

'Aye; I saw you there. So we may regard ourselves as already acquainted.'

He held out a huge muscular hand in token of friendship, and engulfed the little brown paw that shyly slipped into it. The proprieties thus observed, he sat down beside her.

Silence a moment or two, save only for the croon of the burn.

'See yon trout,' said Donald suddenly, pointing. It seemed years since he had spotted a trout in the shadows of a stream. 'Quick . . . beside the dappled stone.'

'Aye,' said his companion, with languid interest. 'There's a big ane in the pool fornenst you.'

'Ever go guddling?'

Interest at once shed most of its languor. What a question to put on the Sabbath day!

'Whiles. But they're gey quick and limber.'

Donald laughed, and at once grew grave again.

'You've had a good look at me, Morag.'

'Aye.'

'And ye see in me a minister o' the gospel.'

'Aye.'

'Or, at least, the makings o' ane.'

Morag was silent. It would not have been just respectful to assent readily to such abatement of title. He was a queer one, though. She liked him . . . what she had seen of him.

'And therefore intended to be burdened wi' the burdens o' my congregation.'

‘Aye.’

‘And it’s a grand day.’

‘It’s weel enough,’ said Morag non-committally. There had been happenings which sadly dimmed its grandeur.

‘Too grand for tears... What’s the matter, Morag? Can I help any, think ye?’

Morag glanced up at him with a vehement shake of the head. The damage was already done. The tears were not far off, but she defiantly winked them back. Already the day seemed brighter, and Donald was very hard to resist. He was so big, and towardly, and understanding. It was not long before Morag was moved to the confessional. Almost involuntarily, she found herself telling him all about it.

She had been skelped, it appeared... literally and soundly walloped, not merely for breaking the Sabbath day, which was bad enough in all conscience, but for nearly breaking her father’s neck into the bargain. Little by little, she allowed the ghastly details to be drawn from her, somewhat sullenly at first, but the more readily for each new hint of his unexpected sympathy and comprehension.

The sight of the big iron wheel of an old barrow that lay rusting beside the midden had started her off on a wild career of crime. She admitted it. She offered no excuses for her conduct. All pastimes were forbidden, and she had no right ever to have touched it.

'I ken fine,' she told him, 'it was bad to be play-
ing on the Sabbath day.'

'Hoot, lassie!' said Donald. 'I'm thinkin' the
Lord never meant the Sabbath day to be tiresome
to man, bairn, or beast. In fact, He said as much.'

Not a word about the Fourth Commandment!
Not a suggestion of horror! Not a hint of reproach!
This was a minister after her own heart . . . a man
it was a privilege to know. Morag drew a little
closer to him, and found that the words came more
easily.

Anyhow, it was a big temptation, to take the
wheel up the hill a bit, and roll it down, and see if it
could be made to run precisely through the gap
between the barn and the henhouse into the big
receptive midden beyond.

Donald half-turned, to measure with his eye the
distance between barn and henhouse, and view the
promising slopes above.

'Almost irresistible,' he decided.

Morag glanced up at him again, this time with
sudden suspicion; but no shadow of a smile played
upon his lips.

'Carry on,' said Donald.

And Morag carried on.

Daring had been bred of success, till, finally,
she went quite a way up the knowe before she let
the wheel go. She had had no conception of the
startling manner in which it would act. Fear came
upon her, as she watched it, strangely mingled
with delight.

It was like a thing possessed. Here, a deep slope gave it terrific momentum. There, a small rock started it bounding. In a moment, it was taking huge and awe-inspiring leaps into the high ether. Morag's eyes opened wide, and her voice became a husky whisper, as she spoke of it.

'Aye,' said Donald appreciatively; 'it's a grand game, but dangerous . . . unco dangerous.'

Morag nodded. Her face clouded over as she proceeded with the tale.

Everything, she said, just seemed to happen all at once. Her father appeared suddenly around the end of the barn. Works of necessity and mercy are permitted, and he was out to feed the chickens, instinct with Sabbath calm, and all unsuspecting of harm. Morag screamed. The wheel swooped for him like a carrion bird, viciously, inevitably. There was no retreat. Lang Peter, dignified pillar of the Free Kirk, flattened himself to the earth on the noisome edge of the midden, in his Sunday blacks, too, while the wheel just grazed his backbone, hopped the dunghill, cleared the road at a single bound, and, like the Gadarene swine, hurled itself down a steep place into the sea.

Donald drew a deep breath.

'A near thing!' said he.

'Aye,' Morag admitted. 'It might weel have cawed the head off of him.'

Thereupon . . . the narrative became sketchy . . . she had been lugged into the cottage, and walloped, violently and at great length, and sent to

bed. As though the walloping were not in itself sufficient! She had escaped subsequently by the window while her father took an afternoon nap.

‘Of course, it’s a pity he was in his Sabbath clothes,’ said Donald judicially. ‘But it was gey hard lines on you he appeared just when he did.’

Morag was already snuggling up to him in a way she found infinitely comforting, and he never said her nay. Indeed, he put an arm about her, and she had an instinctive sense of shelter against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

They talked on many things. They seemed to have quite a lot in common.

In return for her tale, Donald told her of a Fast Day in Innerneuk when he had discovered to his glee that the adjoining parish was not to celebrate till the week after. Fast Day in Scotland is Thursday before Communion; and, to a bairn, it is worse than the Sabbath . . . naturally enough, of course, from the mere fact of its being Thursday. He had only to steal across the parish-boundary, and he could play cricket to his heart’s content. It was great. His position, legally, was almost unassailable. But his father thought otherwise. Donald, too, was skelped; and he was compelled to lie prone under a haircloth sofa for two hours of a gorgeous sunny morning, while his mother, submitting unto her husband, rested above, and fretted over the housework, and read aloud for his benefit something particularly soul-searching and alarming from an old Scottish divine who believed

in hell the very worst way. Then he had to keep the Fast Day of the other parish. He totted up, and decided he had lost on points.

Morag found herself wishing Donald were the real minister of Ardarroch. She could not abide the stout inaccessible apostle who never took any notice of her, unless it were to demand how she was getting on with her lessons, and show no real enthusiasm when she told him she was getting on finely. This was a man with whom it was easy to talk . . . to whom one might even bare the soul. He might have been a bairn himself. He had the point of view. Morag did not miss the twinkle of real comradeship in his eyes.

So she had forgotten all about the time of day. Perhaps she did not care. But Donald was more discreet. He eyed the sun's elevation with some misgiving. He was loath to terminate the interview.

'Ye'll no be wanting another walloping, Morag . . . just in the immediate future?' he queried.

Morag shuddered.

'Then I'm thinking ye'd better be getting back to bed before your father wakes up frae his nap.'

'Imphm.'

'Is yon the window?'

Morag nodded, and submissively left the stone. Together, they repaired to the cottage hand in hand.

There Donald called a halt.

'Is he in the front room?'

‘Aye; on the sofa.’

‘See here, Morag,’ said Donald *sotto voce*: ‘ye may wake him if the stair creaks. I’d better give you a leg up to the window . . . I’m gey feared I’m compounding a felony; but bairns will be bairns.’

And he picked up the little elf, as though she had been a toy, hoisted her on high, and saw her disappear with a flourish of lean brown legs through the open window.

Morag regained her feet in time to wave to him; and Donald gravely raised his shiny tall silk hat, as he turned away.

A very perfect gentle knight.

She watched him tramp down the dusty white road with long swinging strides, till a spur of the Tor hid him from view. Then she began to dream queer dreams about Donald Strachan.

CHAPTER VI

THE SEAMY SIDE

(1)

DURING his last two years at Lyndoch Street Hall, Donald had a settled position. He was in charge of a small mission down near the Broomielaw, supported by the West End congregation with which he had chosen to identify himself. Fergus Carmichael had just been waiting till Donald was free to take over.

‘I’ve long wanted you for this work, Donald,’ he said. ‘It will teach you more than any college. Make no mistake about that. . . . Of course, you’ll have to preach first before my congregation, that the session may judge of your qualifications for the post; but of the issue of that trial I have no doubt.’

And, indeed, Donald stood the trial bravely.

The session met; and Fergus Carmichael, a true man of God if ever there was one, brought to the anxious candidate the result of their deliberation.

‘They like you finely, Donald . . . all but Samuel McLean. He said you mumbled . . . said he couldn’t hear a word of your discourse. All the young ones mumble nowadays.’

Donald was stupefied. He had a voice well-trained to call the cattle home across the moors. And he knew it.

The old man’s eyes twinkled.

‘But dinna take it overmuch to heart,’ he added. ‘Samuel’s stone deaf.’

After his Bible Class, he accompanied the neophyte down to the Broomielaw himself, to introduce him to his new charge.

The service was already in progress under the retiring missionary; and, as they approached, an astounding ditty was borne on the still air.

‘Going to hell . . .’ appeared to be the burden of it. ‘Going to hell . . .’ *allegro con brio*, and ever again: ‘Going to hell . . .’

The words were unmistakable. Donald gazed with some consternation into the immediate future. Truly, there was sore need of a worker in this vineyard.

The Reverend Fergus Carmichael sensed his amazement.

‘It’s all right,’ he said soothingly. ‘You’ll find, haply, much that is unrefined in our worship here, but it’s honest enough. There’s another chorus they love:

“The old religion’s good enough for me.

It was good enough for Peter, when he walked upon the sea;

It was good enough for Daniel, when in the lions’ den;

And surely it’s good enough for Glasgow working-men.”

Come to think of it, you know, it ought to be.’

‘Aye,’ said Donald; but he found himself moved to a yet more ardent loyalty to the Psalms of David.

As they mounted the rude deal platform that dominated the hall, a hundred voices again raised the chorus:

'My old companions, now, farewell.
I am not going with you to hell.'

Donald had a swift glance at the retiring missionary . . . he could not help it . . . and noted that, with instinctive delicacy, he refrained from singing the chorus.

But the sopranos shrilly reiterated the phrase: 'Going to hell,' with obvious emphasis and enjoyment; and, 'Going to hell,' the basses took it up in eerie antiphone.

Ah, well, it was an excellent decision for any one.

And amid these folk Donald put in two years of work . . . work that sometimes seemed hopeless, and sometimes instinct with a strange inspiration. He learned the awful shiftlessness of the poor. He came into touch, as he had never come before, with the clamant wrongs that seem never to be righted, the sorrows that find no abatement, the hideous vices that are ignored in the best circles. He found children sobbing in the streets. Brothels and she-beens were the counter-attractions to his bleak little hall, where the big tea-urn forever simmered in a corner.

He felt very young and immature; but he was learning, and, like Isaiah long ago, he was persuaded that the Lord had given him the tongue of a learner that he might know how to speak a word in season to him that was weary. Some of his little flock were frequently mortally weary; but Donald found them capable of strange heroisms. He saw them with their backs to the wall, fighting rather a gallant

battle against monstrous odds . . . bloody, and broken, and white to the lips, yet contriving somehow to throw in a stiff little tortured grin, and, by the grace of God, to carry on. Aye, he found much to admire in these struggling, almost submerged folk . . . unskilled laborers, down-and-outers, faded old women in fusty black dolmans . . . found, too, friendship and fierce loyalty toward himself, that made him strong.

It was on the approach of one of the mission socials, whimsically dubbed soirées, that he determined to brighten things up a bit. Nothing, he felt, is more somber than the average soirée, unless it be a wake . . . and he had some doubt about making an exception of a wake.

Accordingly, he got his old friend Tulloch, who had been for years the college humorist, to promise a speech which would inevitably provoke unlimited mirth, and he hoped to follow as best he could in his friend's footsteps.

Old Mr. Carmichael sounded a warning note.

'I hear you've got Tulloch to speak at the tea-meeting, Thursday.'

Donald admitted that he had.

'That's fine. And I take it you'll be endeavoring to emulate him, after a fashion.'

Donald said he had a few carefully chosen stories he thought would go down.

The Reverend Fergus Carmichael nodded gravely.

'Imphm . . . Well, far be it from me, Donald, to

infringe in any way upon your liberty. Ye'll do precisely as you like in the matter. I mean just that. But, laddie, you've known these people for two months, more or less. I've known them full forty years. Never heed about Tulloch; they'll appreciate him all right. But, make no mistake about it, they'll be looking to you for something serious and elevating. That's what they want of you, personally . . . something solid . . . something they can bite on . . . something to take home and mull over. Mind you; I'm merely mentioning this out of my experience. You must do as you think best. If you want to experiment, that's your business, and no one will interfere. You're in charge.'

Well, what was a man to do?

Donald arose in meeting, and, for half an hour, he dealt with their souls sternly and solemnly. If that was actually what they were after, they were going to have it. It was by no means his own idea of an evening's release and entertainment, but he went through with it. And his flock listened patiently, as such folk are wont to listen, with here a word to a fractious child, and there again a sigh of deep conviction or contrition.

The only impatient spirit in the place was Tulloch, who was to follow on. He eyed Donald in mingled alarm and reproach . . . with just a dash of solicitude, almost negligible. Good stuff, he realized it to be, but out of place as a rock in the sky . . . a very skeleton at the feast. Tulloch had had no experience of mission soirées. He had wrinkled his

nose a bit on entering, and then tried to pretend that he hadn't: which showed conclusively that he had never been inside a mission. Donald, he felt, was spoiling his atmosphere . . . his emotional atmosphere.

However, he was there, definitely, to amuse these people. That was what he had come for, and they were going to be amused. In very pique, he let himself go, surpassed himself. Never had he risen to such heights of mirth provocation. He began quietly, that the transition might not be too abrupt; but, before long, he had these toil-worn, harassed listeners rocking in their seats with laughter. He tickled them near unto exhaustion. One figure particularly fascinated Donald. It was Hughie Buchanan, a gigantic bearded docker. His mirth was Gargantuan. He held his sides, and slapped his knees; and the tears rolled down his weather-beaten cheeks, the while his raucous guffaws echoed through the hall. What a time! What a gorgeous time!

Donald was not a little vexed that he had allowed himself to be swayed by his bishop. He had, himself, a certain uncouth gift of humor. He might easily have added to the gayety of the occasion. There is a time to mourn and a time to laugh. Never a Hamlet but would fain sometimes play the clown. But it was too late.

At the close of the proceedings, it was Hughie the docker himself who accosted Donald with perfect gravity.

'Maister Strachan,' he said, 'I desire to thank 'ee out o' a fou heart for that powerful and upliftin' message ye brocht to us this night. That does us good. That's what we need. That . . .

'Stop it,' said Donald. He was still writhing under a sense of injury, of having been misled. 'I was watching you when Tulloch was speaking. Oh, I had my eye on you. And you were drinking in every word of it, gloating over it . . .'

A grin of delighted reminiscence flitted swiftly across Buchanan's face.

'Uch, aye!' he readily admitted. 'I have no laughed so muckle in years. Man, but he's the real wee divert is Maister Tulloch, and no mistake. . . . Aye, aye; I can enjoy my laugh as weel's the next ane. But then, ye see' — Hughie dropped his voice to an impressive hoarse whisper — 'we've no responsibeelity for *him*.'

So that was it.

Others might gibber, and caper, and clown it to the delight of the multitude, but never their own missionary. The invidious distinction amused Donald for the moment; but the time was, often enough, in the two years of his ministry there, when he realized the worth of that sense of responsibility they felt toward him . . . their ideals for him, which were bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh . . . and was lifted up and strengthened.

(2)

As Fergus Carmichael had foretold, Donald was

learning much that never appeared in the college curriculum. He was developing his philosophy, and acquiring a creed that was veritably his own. The Broomielaw took him a considerable way out of the academic haze . . . gave him a broader horizon, and a clearer medium through which to regard it. He had insight into the seamy side of life, which is very helpful to any man in dealing with the smooth surface that is usually revealed.

He saw men arrested often enough. He had been arrested himself. But these men were arrested for mean and rather nasty offenses. He had to go and speak comfortably to their wives, and enter into discussion of the best way to make ends meet in the meantime. He got hint of ways of making ends meet which would never have occurred to the good folk up to Innerneuk, poor and needy though they often were. Occasionally, too, he had a feeling that the comfort he offered might be more timely and acceptable when the man came home again.

Once he saw a navvy, lolling blind-drunk on a cart, fall forward and pitch head-first to the cobbles. The soft sinister thud of impact sickened him at the time, and haunted him for days. He had to go and comfort the widow. Comfort, indeed, was in constant demand. Donald began to find that such pastoral visitation required very little of the orthodox theology and conventional Christianity. Something sprouted swiftly in his soul that choked out a good many promising flowers of the spirit approved in religious circles . . . something of a spiritual

vegetable, perhaps, solid, homely sustenance, with, moreover, the healing properties of balm of Gilead. That was what was needed there; and he had a shrewd surmise it was what was needed pretty generally all a world over.

Women sometimes told him strangely intimate things which astounded him.

‘Askin’ of yer pardon, Maister Strachan, for mentionin’ it . . . which I never would’ve done, gin ye had no been a clergyman.’

On a memorable occasion he boldly entered a public-house for the first time in his life, and snatched up from the counter a shilling he had given a needy persuasive individual to buy food for his bairns. Donald saw him go through the swing-door; and such misappropriation of trust funds drove him to primitive passion. The resultant fight with the potman, who fancied himself with his fists, was favorably commented upon in exclusive pugilistic circles, and palpably increased the attendance at his mission for several Sabbaths. He found himself, indeed, gifted with a prestige more precious than rubies, and considerably safer to carry around in these parts.

He grew accustomed to the sight of earnest and compact little groups which broke up suddenly and scattered swiftly at his approach. He learned, too, the real nature of the business conducted in the back shops of the fishmonger and the Jewish rag and bone merchant, and made himself singularly obnoxious to, and respected by, these shrewd

tradesmen, the while he held himself responsible for the ethics of the district.

Then there was a man, who sometimes visited the Broomielaw, and distributed ambitious pamphlets that were intended to blot God out of the universe. The funny thing about it was that he was just about the most God-fearing and Christ-like man Donald had ever met . . . a man who gave all his time, all his talent, and all his spare cash, in a real effort to help out the overdriven and down-trodden masses.

He was a socialist, and Donald had always viewed socialists with inexplicable abhorrence. Suddenly, just as if the gas had been screwed up, he saw that Jesus of Nazareth was a socialist. And this professed atheist was doing precisely the sort of thing that Jesus was forever doing in Galilee and Judæa. It was all very confusing at first. That was apparently the ideal he loved, the ideal he served, the ideal by which he lived, though, doubtless, he would never have identified it with Jesus of Nazareth. Donald got it down on the tablets of his soul . . . oh, not just at once, but after much pondering, and heart-searching, and actual experience of the stranger's grace . . . that the love of Christ may constrain a man all unawares. An epoch-making discovery.

Then, again, in various conversations and arguments with this wrong-headed but right-hearted Caliph of Baghdad, it dawned on Donald Strachan that the God the man abhorred, the God he blas-

phemed and longed to obliterate, never really existed . . . was just a curious blood-stained idol, conjured up out of a few atrocities culled at random from the Books of Judges and Chronicles, and charged with all man's inhumanity to man. . . . He had simply gotten a little mixed up in his terms. That was all. He was actually worshiping, inspired by, and possessed of a certain Spirit, which he rather irreverently called common decency . . . though he revered it exceedingly, and it was by no means common. Donald would have called it God . . . 'at all events, the elementary makings o' a concept o' God.' What does the label matter, anyhow? He began to question if there was ever such a thing as an atheist.

He talked over all these matters with the Reverend Fergus Carmichael, and that shrewd old man nodded, and smiled, and twinkled; put in a word here and there, but, for the most part, let Donald formulate things for himself; saw Donald wandering sometimes far from the accepted highway of orthodoxy, yet remained quite unperturbed.

Indeed, it was Donald himself who was sometimes visited with misgivings.

'I'm gey feared o' heresy,' he said, '... whiles.'

'Oh, are you that?' said his mentor. 'Aye, aye . . . gey *feared* o' heresy! . . . Man, you're just about the most thoroughgoing young heretic it has ever been my good fortune to come across. Imphm! We're like to hear the word pretty often in the days that are coming. We're in a sort of transition

stage, and poor old Scotland must needs be rent asunder, as it has been before. Aye; all the fundamentals o' the faith are gone into the melting-pot.'

For the moment he seemed a little wan and depressed . . . an old man looking wistfully for peace on earth, when there was no peace; but he pulled himself together.

'Trust you the Spirit o' Truth to guide you, laddie; and dinna fash your head about heresy. The man who preaches a gospel he doesn't believe, just because it is considered orthodox, and the man who refuses to preach some new truth that has convinced his soul, lest he be condemned for heresy, are on a par . . . and it's a pretty low par. Aye speak the truth, Donald, and shame the Devil.'

'I'll do my best,' said Donald stoutly.

'The human mind and heart and spirit,' continued the old man, 'just canna avoid growth. Sentiment, old associations, fear o' novelty, all stand in the way; but the truth is great, and shall prevail. Every great teacher the world has known, ye might say, was a heretic . . . Darwin, Emerson, Luther, Galileo, Paul, Hosea, Moses. And never forget, laddie, there never was such another daring novelty in religious development as Christianity itself. Aye, I'm thinking, the safe and canny type of Christian who predominates in all the churches is sadly unlike the Man who risked all. Jesus of Nazareth was the most daring heretic the world has ever known.'

'That's so,' Donald agreed, 'right enough.'

'But, mind you, He was aye scrupulous o' the mental freedom of His hearers. Listen: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. . . . Not all men can receive this, but they to whom it is given. . . . He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. . . . I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." When it was a question of truth: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." When it was a question of right and duty: "What is written in the Law? How readest thou? . . . What think ye?" . . . Aye the appeal to men to reason, to think freely, to trust their own insight. Lay it to heart, Donald. It's the attempt to force a faith on men, whether new or old, that brings endless divisions and fruitless controversies to pass.'

Then:

'What it must be to be young in these days. . . . Aye, aye. What it must be to be young! . . . God guide you, my son.'

(3)

So the time of his training drew to an end, and the exit examinations came on. Donald had some reason to dread these exit examinations, for he was sadly overdriven. His little mission church occupied a great portion of his time, and he dared not slack up in his studies.

One piece of rare good fortune, though, was his.

The most important item in the exit examination is the trial sermon, which must be written on a

prescribed text . . . and the text prescribed is sometimes enough to turn a man's hair gray . . . forwarded to a member of the examining committee, and, if the report on it be favorable, read in part before the assembled Presbytery.

To his relief, Donald was allotted a text on which he had already preached, a text he had actually selected of his own free will. He had never read the sermon to any one . . . written it, of course, and thereafter, having gotten his ideas clearly into line, he had simply spoken out of a full heart in his little mission. But the sermon was there, complete; and its author, sore-stressed, burning the midnight oil, cramming Old Testament and New Testament Exegesis, Church History, Christian Ethics, and at the same time spending himself without stint in his exacting little vineyard, never even thought of revision. Why should he? The Presbytery wanted nothing abnormal of him. They simply wanted to know how he preached. Here was a sermon he had already preached acceptably . . . the sort of sermon he was going to preach in the future. By it, he would stand or fall. With little more than a cursory glance at the opening sentences and a recapitulation of the divisions, he sent it off, and dismissed it from his thoughts.

In due course he was notified to attend the Presbytery; and, when the momentous morning dawned, Donald set forth to try his destiny.

His name was called, and his manuscript handed to him.

Even Donald Strachan could not but waver a little as he arose to lecture these grave and reverend folk, men who had grown gray in the ministry, men who stood at the very summit of their profession, men whose names were household words, and before whose glance sinners were wont to tremble.

Terrible things sometimes happened at these trials. Suppose he should be challenged! The Presbytery had ever a keen nose for heresy, and he really recalled very little of this discourse he was about to deliver.

There flashed across his mind a sort of saga of the Hall. It paid glowing tribute to a neophyte, who was halted in his trial sermon on a point of doctrine, and calmly argued out the matter at such length that a dour old suburban minister grew restive under it.

‘Tuts!’ he burst out. ‘This argy-bargying between a student and his examiners is fair intolerable.’

‘All right,’ said the youth with unabashed good humor. ‘Stop it.’

But Donald was not like that.

In a somewhat shaky voice he announced his text; and the Moderator spoke to him words of encouragement.

‘A most inspiring topic, Mr. Strachan. Now just take your time, and never heed us. We’ve all been through it ourselves. How are you going to divide it?’

More confidently, Donald outlined his firstly, secondly, thirdly.

‘Very good . . . very good, indeed,’ said the benign old gentleman. ‘Now we shall hear what you have to say under the first head.’

Donald was in his stride now, and he swung smoothly along, till again the commendatory voice of the Moderator stopped him.

‘Excellent, Mr. Strachan. We shall take your secondly and thirdly as read. Will you give us the practical application . . . and just imagine it is your own congregation you are addressing.’

He little knew for what he was asking.

Donald turned the pages, and launched into his conclusion; but suddenly he faltered. He ought really to have read through the sermon before sending it off. It had been outlined for a perverse and stiff-necked little community, apparently in an hour when his soul was wrung within him by the sights he had seen. All very well for the Moderator to bid him imagine he was addressing his own congregation, but there are limits to human imagination.

There was nothing for it but to carry on.

‘Is there a drunkard here?’ he demanded, and the nervous strain under which he spoke gave an added poignant earnestness to the question. One felt that he could not be hoodwinked. Denials were useless. He stared wildly at the venerable assemblage before him, but there was no response.

‘Aye, is there,’ Donald went on mechanically.

‘I could point the finger at some here that have been borne home worse than any brute beast.’

The tension at this point became almost unbearable.

‘Is there a man who has been guilty of even more abominable excesses? . . . Oh, I have been in and out among you. I know the sort of lives you lead, and ye may well think shame o’ yourselves. I know what your wives must often suffer . . .’

They say ministers are apt to become paganized through lack of opportunity to listen to warning and exhortation; but the whole Presbytery suffered searching overhaul that morning. Two or three spiritual leaders sat up suddenly, and stared as though hypnotized. Some nervously fingered their beards. Others hid their faces in their hands. And Donald manfully labored to bring the matter home to them, and convince them of sin, beseeching them to take thought and repent, and unburden their souls. You could have heard a pin drop.

‘Now, a word to you mothers . . .’

Some distraught soul in the background hic-coughed wildly, and the Moderator rose to his feet.

‘Mr. Strachan,’ he said, and his words were as balm to that fevered wight, ‘it is long since I have listened to so masterly and moving a discourse. You have given us precisely what we desire to hear, yet seldom are privileged to hear . . . such a practical sermon as you would preach to your own

flock. It would be helpful to any of us to sit under your ministrations. Need I say that we heartily endorse your license?’

There was no dissentient voice.

CHAPTER VII

THE VACANCY

ONLY a few months later, Donald received his first 'vacancy' . . . his first appointment to preach in a kirk that was on the outlook for a minister.

Each licentiate on the list is allowed two vacancies a year for seven years. Thereafter, if he has not received a call, he is advised to try some other work. He is become that most pathetic of objects in Scotland, a stickit minister.

No fear of Donald sticking. When Ardarroch Free Kirk fell vacant, the selection committee had a glance at the list of probationers, and actually made application that Donald Strachan might be sent as one of the candidates. They pleaded that they required a man with the Gaelic, and added that the congregation had been deeply impressed with Mr. Strachan's qualities on a former occasion. Donald was duly notified to preach in the vacant Free Kirk of Ardarroch; and from that moment there was little question regarding the first parish in which he should be settled.

A solemn deputation, in their Sabbath clothes, met him on the pier: Andra McKelvie, and Menzies, and Hector Pitcaithly, the herd, and, of course Willie Bannerman, the pier-master, though he was not on the committee. Bannerman lavishly waved

aside the pier-dues of twopence . . . an excellent omen.

And they greeted their candidate with as much spontaneous enthusiasm as they were ever able to muster:

‘Aye; so ye’re here!’

And: ‘Ye’ll have had a gey snell wind on the water.’

And: ‘See’s a grip o’ your bag. Ye’re to bide wi’ Miss Robertson, up to Meikle Loan.’

The manse stood on a little knoll back from the road a way, almost overlooking the pier; but, of course, at this time it was unoccupied.

Donald could have sworn he had a glimpse of Morag McAllister, awaiting him patiently at the end of the pier, though it might have been the wish was father to the thought. Little Morag was an integral part of that Ardarroch dream which he had often dreamed since first he had visited the place . . . all of a piece with the fragrance of the honey-suckle, and the heather bloom, and the sheen of the sea. But, when he reached the toll-box, there was no one to be seen. If Morag had actually been there, she had vanished in thin air. He had an odd sense of disappointment.

It warmed his heart, though, to be greeted hospitably by a couthy, deep-bosomed country-woman up to Meikle Loan, and to find a feast all set out of fresh-baked scones, and new-laid eggs, and tea with thick cream. He could not help but notice, too, a subtle difference in reception from

that to which he had been accustomed as mere itinerant pulpit-supply. There seemed a certain personal interest . . . a touch of deference . . .

'Then we'll look for ye the morn,' said Andra McKelvie on behalf of the deputation, by way of benediction.

And in some occult Scots way Donald knew they wished him well.

Later, as he went for a tramp along the dusty road by the sea, his heart swelled within him. There was no palpable reason why it should, but the heart often does operate independently of reason. He was singularly moved, and singularly happy. He could hear a late lark singing as it soared in the blue, and yellowhammers were clamant in the long grass by the hedges, and whaups were crying as they winged their way inland. The sea crooned softly to herself, as a country-maid will croon when all goes well. It delighted him. All seemed to voice a friendly welcome.

This was like to be his home. His dreams were coming true.

There were but three shops in the village. First came McKelvie's, part groceries, part haberdashery, part post-office, with ever an assortment of packing-cases and kegs on the grassy slope before the door, the forum in which, while awaiting the mail, one could discuss all things in life. They were discussing the proposed union of the Free Kirk with the U.P.s at the time, not without heat.

Your orthodox Free Kirker aye regarded a U.P. as an ungodly sort of body, sadly lax in doctrine. They broke off as Donald passed, to touch their caps respectfully. Donald returned their salutations with just the right admixture of geniality and dignity. Farther along was Red McAllister's, Fruits and Vegetables, with a side line of singularly gassy ginger-beer, locally known as bowff. Just beyond the pier was Gavin Leitch's bakery.

From the smithy came the cling-clang of hammer on anvil, and the acrid smell of seared horse-hoofs, and the fizz of hot iron plunged into water. The smithy cuddled up against the graveyard, where ancient headstones still kept vigil around the Auld Kirk, though drooping a little, many of them, from age. The Auld Kirk manse is a hazard on the golf-course, and not even summer visitors dare to invade the little garden in quest of sliced balls. Two ploughmen were playing quoits with horseshoes before the smithy.

If you desire strong liquor, you cannot have it in Ardarroch. You must needs walk over to the hotel in Craigieness, where, of an evening, you may discover Colin Urquhart and Donald Menzies, grim bearded men, breathing heavily over a checker-board. They would call it a dam-brod themselves . . . but only under great persuasion, for they seldom use words unnecessarily.

Down by the Lade Burn side was a caravan, which in the memory of the oldest inhabitant had always pitched there once a year, while the gypsies

mended your kettles, or sold you basketwork and brushes. A lean white horse was cropping the grass among the whin-bushes.

Near by, Souter McAllister made or cobbled your boots in his little cottage called Ballymenach, but did not rise to the dignity of a shop.

Donald Strachan must needs pause at the cottage, to confer with the precentor on the psalms for the morrow. Preaching for a vacancy is no ordinary occasion, when a man may dictate his choice in the very vestry before the service.

Chapping on the front door, he was cordially greeted by Lang Peter himself.

‘Imphm; it’s you? Man, I surmised ye might be by. Come awa’ ben.’

And he was escorted with ceremony into the front room. A fine front room it was, too, with texts and a dish-rack and a wag-at-the-wall clock and a haircloth sofa. Everything was as clean as human hands could make it. Steel fender and fire-irons gleamed like silver; and the feathery grasses and peeled honesty in the grate might have been newly gathered. Of course, the big family Bible on the red table cover never had much chance to gather dust in Peter McAllister’s home. It was in faithful use, morning and evening. But the very texts on the walls looked just as if they had been scoured, and the china fairly shone from the rack.

‘Ye’ll hae looked up the psalms?’ said the precentor.

'Aye,' said Donald. 'Ye'll want four, if I mind right.'

'Four's customary,' said Lang Peter.

And, without waste of time, the tunes were chosen, to which they should be sung . . . grand historic old tunes like 'Covenanters' and 'Martyrdom,' tunes to stir the heart to a quicker throb, and lift a man above his workaday world.

That over, they were at liberty to visit together, just like ordinary mortals.

'And where's my wee friend Morag?' queried Donald.

The souter inclined his head in the direction of the kitchen.

'Turning oot a wheen scones for supper, I'm thinkin'. Oh, Morag's the grand wee housewife, gettin', when she's the mind to it.'

'Aye; and a comely bit lassie, too,' said Donald gallantly.

The souter's brows knitted; and Donald was conscious of an immediate instinctive pity for his little friend.

'Noo, Maister Strachan, if so be ye're comin' here, I hope ye winna start by flattering the bairn.' He dropped his voice to a sepulchral undertone. 'Godliness is afore comeliness, ye ken; an' she's already ower much given to the outward adornment o' plaiting the hair and putting on of apparel, to my way o' thinking. Aye; man looketh on the outward appearance, but . . .'

'True enough,' said Donald lightly, a little res-

tive under the rebuke. He saw no reason why comeliness should not be superimposed upon godliness, but he had no wish to draw the souter's fire.

Lang Peter raised his voice.

'Oh, Morag!'

'Aye, father.'

There were sounds of hasty washing at the sink; and Morag stole into the room, glowing all over to be thus remembered and summoned, curtsied, and extended a moist but friendly hand.

Donald retained it firmly in his own.

'Morag,' he said, 'wasn't that you I spotted at the pierhead?'

Morag nodded, obviously in some confusion.

'I didna mean for you to see me.'

The precentor rallied her with heavy-footed humor.

'Aha! So that's where ye were, ye stravaigin' little hussy?'

Morag was understood to mutter something about a message to the bakery, but was charmingly unconvincing.

'And what was it took you, that you disappeared the way you did?' said Donald, with infinite reproach.

Morag hung her head.

'It was no for the likes o' me to intrude.'

'Havers!' said Donald stoutly. 'That's just where you're laboring under a gross misapprehension. For you're the first friend I ever acquired in Ardarroch. Will you keep mind o' that?'

This was news to Lang Peter McAllister, but fortunately it did not stir his curiosity.

'I'll mind,' said Morag; and Donald let her go.

All very embarrassing and disturbing . . . but delightful, too, for a little lass.

'Morag,' said the souter, 'is ane o' your staunchest supporters, Maister Strachan.'

Morag admitted this was so, and Donald thanked her warmly.

Suddenly the souter awoke to a sense of his obligations.

'Ye'll stay, and hae a bite o' supper?' he said hospitably.

Donald, somewhat feebly, demurred.

'It seems as though I'd just finished my tea.'

But he made no actual move to depart.

'Please!' pleaded Morag, all uplifted at the thought of ministering to her hero.

That settled the matter, of course.

'Why, thank ye kindly,' Donald assented. He sniffed approvingly. 'And, if these be potato scones I smell . . .'

But he never finished his remark. Morag, at the moment, was transfigured into a cyclonic little housewife, who hurled herself at the kitchen door.

Even as he spoke, indeed, the smell had grown in intensity till it could not be ignored.

'They're burning!' she wailed.

For they had kept her blethering there, and she had forgotten all about her girdle. Dreadful things

were taking place. And that it should have happened on this day, of all the days in her life!

‘Tut! Tut!’ said the souter, with impatient shake of the head. ‘It’s no like the lassie. She hasna burnt her scones in a twalmonth. . . . My! But that’s just sheer carelessness and wastery. I canna understand. . . .’

‘Can’t, hey?’ said Donald abruptly. He sensed the darkness of the tragedy, and was already on his feet. ‘Man, there’s no one to blame but our two selves. Did we no fetch her in here, and take her off her work? Did we no keep her here, when she might have been minding her girdle? Understand! Aye, it’s easy enough to understand. And I’m going right ben to tell her so. Poor wee lass!’

Forthwith he hastened ben the kitchen, to solace, as best he could, the disconsolate little housewife.

Tragedy enough! Morag was in tears over the wreck of her handiwork.

‘Dinna take it to heart,’ Donald comforted her. ‘Just you put the blame on us. . . . It was all our fault. . . . It was . . .’

‘Look at them,’ said Morag.

Donald looked at them. They were a pitiful spectacle.

‘I like them a wee birsled, myself, on one side,’ he ventured.

For a moment Morag regarded him in sheer breathless wonder, but only for a moment.

‘Birsled!’ she exploded, and yet again: ‘Birsled!’

... Mercy on us! D'ye call that birsled? ... They're burrnt to a cinder.'

Nevertheless, she could not help but smile a little through her tears. Already the clouds had thinned a bit. Donald had a great way with him. It was not long before he had accomplished all he had set out to do . . . a notable achievement; and he was able to return to the front room and gravely discuss kirk-matters with a curiously appeased Peter. A curiously light-hearted Morag was bustling around, setting forth on a clean white tablecloth a new batch of potato scones, a wee birsled on one side, and toast that was done to a turn, and butter in a lordly dish, and home-made jam, and skim-milk cheese. Her heart sang within her like a lintie.

No doubt in Donald's mind, by the time supper was ended, whether Peter McAllister would vote for him. Morag, he knew, would lend moral support . . . every particle of it she had to lend. And he took his way, more than ever hoping and praying that this might veritably be the field of his ministry.

Only one small fly entered into his ointment.

Before returning to Meikle Loan and the hospitality of Miss Robertson, he was moved to go all the way up to Fairy Dell and back again. And it was as he came down the steep Honeysuckle Lane he met a heavy beetle-browed carter driving a gorgeous Clydesdale up the brae toward Auchenhaun. He caught the carter's eye fixed upon him in obvious speculation.

‘Fine evening,’ said Donald cheerfully.

The farmer turned in his seat, and cupped a large heavy ear with his hand.

‘Eh?’

Donald was already beyond him.

‘It’s been a splendid day,’ he shouted, and motioned him on his way.

But the man meant to get to the bottom of the matter, whatever it was.

‘Whoa-oa-oa.’

The cart came to a standstill, and the farmer dismounted and put a stone behind the wheel.

By this time Donald was uncomfortable. He had an instant temptation to take to his heels; but it would never have done. It would have told strongly against him. Apologetically, he turned back to explain that he had merely hazarded a remark on the weather . . . a perfectly valid remark, but of no great moment.

‘Damn!’ said the farmer, and, climbing laboriously on the shaft again, whipped up the Clydesdale.

Donald was abashed. Obviously, here was one upon whose vote he could no longer count with certainty.

‘Who was the dour profane person driving up Auchenhaun way?’ he asked his hostess.

‘That would be Farmer McMillan,’ the buxom lady identified him at once. ‘He went by, not ten minutes since. . . . Eh! but was he profane to you? I maun give him a talking-to about that. He was

ever a dreich crotchety carmudgeon, if there was one. But he hasna had our advantages, Maister Strachan. . . . Dinna fash your head aboot him. He's Auld Kirk.'

Donald heaved a sigh of relief. It was not to be expected that such an one would readily exchange amenities with a prospective leader of the dissenters.

So he went to bed with a heart at peace with all the world; and in due course the fateful morning dawned.

Things went well with him. Donald would have been sadly lacking in perception if he had not felt the spiritual uplift that came from his little congregation. Of course, there were people like Sneddon of Tighnaheugh and Miss Turnbull, who never could be stampeded into a popular judgment. If the Apostle Paul had been preaching for the vacancy of Ardarroch, they would have sat in judgment on his effort, and approved or disapproved strictly in accordance with its merits. Sneddon used to mark and date the texts in his Bible, so that he could tell at once if a sermon was repeated, no matter how long after. He was that sort of man. But one here and one there got an elbow on the back of the pew before him, and rested chin upon clenched fist, and greedily drank in every word. These are the Aarons, inarticulate themselves, perhaps, who uphold the hands of Moses till he has prevailed. Little Morag, solitary in her pew, just radiated inspiration. She adored

the preacher as a child adores, fully and frankly, keeping nothing back. Hector Pitcaithly groaned a shade more deeply than usual, as the sermon searched his soul, which meant that he was a shade more deeply appreciative. And Gavin Leitch, who was slow to move, might have been seen to dig a fist into an open palm, with muttering and emphatic nod of the head . . . but no one had eyes for Gavin Leitch at the moment.

The only untoward incident occurred when Donald smote the big pulpit Bible.

Around the cushion, on which the Bible rested, was festooned a thick silken cord, ending on each side in a tassel . . . a tassel with a heavy wooden core: an innocent enough thing even to those who were desperately suspicious of all ornamentation. Donald was no Bible-thumper; but, just as he was in the middle of his discourse, and the congregation gaped on him in breathless silence, he did happen to emphasize a point pretty heavily. Whereupon the tacking of the cord gave way, and down swung the tassel with disastrous effect.

However, as it turned out, even this redounded to his credit . . . aye, haply clinched his suitability for the kirk in the minds of a few waverers.

Prophetic, too, it was, in its way.

Lang Peter McAllister was sitting in the precentor's box, his head resting against the pulpit, his eyes closed as if in sleep. Peter said he could listen better that way. He aye closed his eyes to shut out all distraction. In any case, the tassel caught him

such a dirl on the ear as he had not known since boyhood.

‘Honk!’ said Peter, loud out, and stared wildly about him, while the congregation wrestled gamely with their emotions, and little Morag’s eyes stood out from her head.

Donald, arrested in the middle of a sentence, poked his head cautiously over the pulpit desk, but failed to take in the situation.

‘My hearers,’ he said, ‘I have no conception what it may be that amuses you, but I’ll just wait till ye’ve had your laugh out, and then we shall proceed in the solemnity befitting our meditation on the Word o’ God.’

And wait he did, patiently enough, till every last little giggle subsided. Then he proceeded as though there had been no interruption.

That was Donald’s way, always sympathetic . . . and sensible too. It impressed the folk. The incident was gey upsetting. Even Farmer Sneddon would have admitted that. But, if he had floundered in his discourse because of it, he was done. A man who could have been grievously put out by any such thing could never have been the man for Ardarroch.

And there were more in the kirk at night than had been in the forenoon, than which there could be no greater tribute to any preacher.

CHAPTER VIII

INSURGENT AND LOYALIST

(I)

It was not to be expected that Donald Strachan would be elected to Ardarroch Kirk without opposition. Such expectation would have been a grave aspersion on the critical faculty of the community.

Colin Urquhart was unaccountably strong for a shilpit loon, with an impressive mop of fair hair and a squeaky voice . . . an unwholesome-looking preacher.

'Minded me o' Jonah, somehow,' said Miss Robertson at random, when his name was brought up. 'He seemed as if he might have been swallowed up once, and then . . .'

She hesitated. Once launched, she was a little doubtful if she could finish creditably. Andra McKelvie saved her. Andra, honest man, had aye a good word for anybody.

'An earnest lad,' he interrupted.

'Aye; he was that,' said Colin impressively. 'I'd no sooner looked upon him than it seemed as if the word came: Arise, anoint him, for this is he.'

But it was of no avail. His words might have had more weight if it had not already been noised abroad that the lad in question was the son of a Govan policeman married on Colin's wife's sister.

He did not even have a seconder. Nepotism was not to be countenanced in Ardarroch under any consideration.

But there were others.

Farmer Sneddon of Tighnaheugh urged the claims of a powerful thickset obscurantist, who had preached for an hour on Isaac digging out again the wells of his father Abraham which the Philistines had stopped. It was a fierce denunciation of the dangerous Modernism of recent days. He was obviously desperately opposed to the opening-up of any new springs. No, no; get ye back again to the wells of your fathers, he thundered, and see that they are purged of all the rubbish with which they have been choked up. This dastardly work of the Philistines, in particular, lent itself to vivid soul-searching treatment. This was a man who could not be ignored.

Miss Turnbull thought Donald Strachan over young . . . a mere laddie, so to speak; and Mirren Leitch of the bakery, who was invariably on the losing side through an inherent dislike of majorities, objected to him in a general way.

But Sneddon was particularly critical of Donald, and little Morag, who feloniously heard every word through an open window, not being a church member herself, was sore vexed at him.

'I dinna like the man,' said Sneddon frankly, 'for I'm minded he is o' the breed o' these very moderns that are the troublers of Israel. I'm all against these new-fangled methods. Did ye note,

for instance, how he called us "My hearers"? "My hearers"! Did ever ye hear the like frae a Free Kirk pulpit? "Brethren," if ye like, or mayhap, in a moment of deep emotion "Beloved"; but "My hearers" beats a'. And "We shall join in prayer," said he, when the formula approved, as every one kens, is: "Let us unite in prayer." Domineerin', I call it, and savoring strong o' ecclesiasticism. Aye, and a trustworthy man would have opened the Book, and said: "Let us read together in the Word o' God, as it is contained in the Epistle o' Saint Paul to the Romans." But no he! "We shall read from Paul's letter to the Church of Rome." It's no just reverent. It's unscriptural. What authority has he to call it a letter, when, beyond dispute, the Book calls it an Epistle? Tell me that. It's all this Higher Criticism they talk about. It makes a man gey devoutless in handlin' the Word. And it's taking... like a disease. I mistrust he's already tainted wi' it. There never was a time when there was sorer need for the elect to stand fast in the faith.'

'Amen,' said Colin Urquhart fervently, by way of endorsement.

Tighnaheugh misunderstood him.

'I'm no feenished yet,' he said sourly, and continued:

'As for his discourse, there was little in it upon which ye could lay finger and say: This is unsound doctrine. I grant ye that. Oh, he was gey carefu'. And he was not without eloquence o' a kind. But

he had a way o' putting things that was disturbing, to say the least of it. Whiles, it would be just an everyday sort o' remark, that would be all very well in ordinary conversation, but seemed entirely out o' place, and unsanctified, comin' frae the pulpit. And, whiles, it would be a queer wee twist he gave to a consecrated phrase that made it seem different altogether, and just turned the bread o' heaven to ashes in the mouth.

'Not one of us but kens that grand assurance o' the Apostle Paul: "For we all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord . . ."'

He paused, and gazed fiercely about him. The words were certainly familiar enough to all. They had learned them when they were bairns, and Farmer Sneddon himself saw to it that they kept them in mind. Never was he called upon to lead in prayer at the week-night service but he declaimed these fine words. Addressing God as: 'Thou, who hast trodden doon the young lion and the dragon,' he would go on, to linger lovingly on the feast that was prepared for the elect, 'of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow' . . . which always nauseated little Callum Menzies, who had a weak stomach; and it led up naturally to the great verse he had quoted: 'For we all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord . . .' He had a regular formula, with which he was well content.

'What are we to think,' he asked, almost peev-

ishly, 'when a man changes it to "reflecting, like a mirror, the glory of God"? Does it no take all the tang out of it? Aye, aye; it may be a revised version, but I'm not as these Athenian bodies that spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. I like what I've been accustomed to. This Higher Criticism and Modernism will breed naught but rabblement, and babblement, and squabblement. I desire the old familiar doctrines, in the old familiar way; and my vote is definitely against Mr. Donald Strachan.'

All this eloquence was thrown away. Donald had an overwhelming majority; and even Sneddon had, perforce, to fall in line and make the call unanimous. He did it with an ill grace.

But Morag was unappeased.

Wherefore she got into serious trouble with her father, the cobbler, for the heinous crime of clodding Farmer Sneddon without any visible excuse, deliberately and of malice aforethought. She did not like the man, anyhow. He was churlish by nature, a very son of Belial, and, when he did unbend, became patronizing, and therefore insulting. She had never previously gotten as far as assault and battery. But strange and beautiful things were springing up in Morag's ungracious little soul, and for them she was prepared to override the conventions. She fought for an ideal, like any good wee Covenanter; and Farmer Sneddon happened to plant himself in the way of that ideal. Sneddon had spoken something akin to blasphemy.

It was just as that dour black-bearded soul was making his lonely way homeward through the long summer gloaming, a large divot, evidently a ranging shot, took him full in the waistcoat; and, before he had time to cough, a second divot, with elevation duly corrected to painful accuracy, filled his ear with earth and small pebbles, and he descried Morag scurrying like a partridge through the heather.

This entirely unprovoked assault moved the choleric victim to speak at large with Souter McAllister on the subject of the upbringing of children.

‘Aye, Peter,’ he admitted in the end, ‘I canna say but, on the whole, ye’ve dealt faithfully wi’ your own. It’s the spirit o’ the age that’s to blame. Ye can see the trend in everything. It’s a reckless, heady age . . . iconoclastic and regairdless. The old traditions are slippin’; and bairns have no the same respect for their elders they used to have in our young days. What may be at hand, Peter, is terrible to contemplate. The younger generation’s full o’ vain thoughts and divers passions, and there seems to be no holdin’ them. To tell the truth, I dinna ken what the world’s coming to, spiritually, poleetically, or in the family circle . . .’

Lang Peter gravely shook his head over it.

‘Still,’ said Tighnaheugh, brightening up a little as with a shining vision, ‘we maun aye do our best to dam the encroaching tide o’ worldliness, and willfulness, and folly; and he that spareth the rod, ye ken, spoileth the child.’

'Aye, aye,' admitted the souter grimly. The souter, to his credit be it said, had never spared the rod. Stern and dark was the discipline he wielded. 'But Morag's getting ower big to be skelped now ... I canna think where she gets her temper. Certainly it's no frae me.'

Farmer Sneddon snorted cynically.

'Weel,' he said, 'that should simplify the problem considerably.'

But he said it in such a manner as, perhaps, moved the souter to deal less harshly with his offspring than otherwise he might have done.

Morag pleaded guilty without the slightest hesitation, and was deprived of butter to her bread for a week. Firmly she declined to state any real reason for the assault.

'He was needin' it,' she maintained. 'A nasty, upsettin' puggy o' a creature!'

And there were those in the village, aghast at her audacity, who would have heartily endorsed her assertion.

'The deil'll get his ain,' Miss Robertson was wont to remark, with a shrewd disregard of the outside of the platter, 'when Sneddon dees.'

Morag settled down to her dry bread with something akin to solemn joy.

(2)

It was not long before Donald was duly ordained to the Ardarroch Free Kirk, the Reverend Fergus Carmichael assisting ... at least to the extent of

preaching the Sabbath morning sermon, and formally introducing the new minister to his people.

He preached on the words of Paul: 'I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.'

At the close of his sermon, he said:

'My friends, it is in such a spirit of hope I believe your young minister comes among you, whom you welcome to his pulpit to-day. Of himself I do not wish to speak in his own presence and especially in this place, where I know he will ever seek to be hid behind the Master whose message he bears. But of the work he has already done it is right you should know; and it is a joy to me to bear testimony to it.'

And the old man's face lit up, and glowing testimony he bore, so that Donald's heart burned within him.

A gaunt country-woman was installed as house-keeper in the old gray ivy-covered manse at thirty shillings a month; and Donald entered into possession.

How that ivy had been detested by the wife of the former minister!

'Nothing but a harbinger o' damp and insects!'

But she had never quite dared strip it from the walls. Bless her heart! Whatever would the Deacons' Court have said if the manse had been thus denuded? A beautiful little manse, therefore, it remained, and forever the latchstring was out for all comers.

You entered the garden by a little green gate, and took your way leisurely up the gravel walk between borders of foxgloves, none-so-pretty, and hollyhocks, that stood sentinel before the roses . . . if it was that time of the year. The outer hedge was, of course, of fuchsias. The gooseberries and currants were at the back, as far removed as possible from the marauding small boy.

And the garden was already scrupulously tidy. It had never been beyond reproach in former days; but once Donald Strachan had preached for the vacancy of Ardarroch, the wilderness just seemed to rejoice and blossom as the rose. You see, it was part of the beadle's job to tend the garden in his spare moments; and, if the beadle's daughter Morag suddenly took it into her head to take it off his hands and make of it a labor of love, so much the better. That was as it should be.

Having passed through the garden, you went up a creaky stair that led from the lobby to an uncompromising little study, which, nevertheless, had one eastern window, letting in a glory of sunlight, if there were sunlight going, during the creative morning hours.

Three walls were lined with simple deal bookshelves containing Donald's tools, all very keen and serviceable. George Adam Smith's 'Isaiah' and 'The Twelve Prophets,' very close to hand. What better interpreter of the great mystics of Israel? But over against these somewhat advanced volumes, and holding the balance true: Calvin's

'Institutes,' that sadly misread work, and Hodge's 'Theology,' and old Matthew Henry's 'Exposition' . . . weighty and disciplinary tomes.

Again, one might have noticed Robertson Smith's 'Old Testament and the Jewish Church,' Orr's 'Christian View of God and the World,' Denney's 'Studies in Theology.' This last was just out, and singularly suggestive . . . a book which grievously disturbed the fundamentalists.

Parker's 'People's Bible,' in twenty-five black volumes, took up a whole shelf by itself. Max Müller was there, Henry Drummond, Fox's 'Book of Martyrs,' of course, and Bunyan's 'Grace Abounding' . . . a catholic collection . . . Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' bound volumes of 'The Spectator,' R. L. S., Browning, Carlyle complete . . . strong meat for men.

There were a few, singularly few, novels: Galt . . . Donald had a curious perverse way of always putting him first . . . and Walter Scott, Barrie, odd volumes of Dickens . . . 'Bleak House' was his favorite, perhaps because Jarndyce was so obviously an ancestor of old Fergus Carmichael . . . Thackeray, Eugène Sue, Kipling . . .

And there he would light his pipe, and, haloed with clean tobacco smoke, discuss with any visitor all things in heaven, or on the earth, or in the waters under the earth.

Morag never entered the study, of course, but the garden she took for her very own. Schooling had ended. She had graduated *summa cum laude*.

There was only housework to do, and every moment she could steal from housework she was prepared to give to the manse garden. The villagers commented on it. Aye, but it needed it sore, when first she took it in hand. Her passion for weeding, hitherto unsuspected, astounded Lang Peter. It was just another of these characteristics of which he could not surmise the origin. Certainly she did not get it frae him. But the flowers seemed to appreciate it, were stirred to their best efforts, and responded as never before in the history of Ardar-roch manse. Morag loved flowers, anyhow.

Fifteen years of age now; and these had not been happy years. Souter McAllister had dealt with her faithfully according to his lights, but his lights burned somewhat fitfully. The only God he knew was of wrath and vengeance toward a trembling people. Such was the God he followed; and such Peter might almost have been himself to Morag. He was no fit man to be trusted with a bairn. He had asked of her nothing save implicit obedience, learned of her nothing, sought no niche in her vacant little heart, never even realized her winsomeness.

She had a rather dreary time of it. No books were allowed her, except the Bible, school-books, and a few volumes of strong religious savor . . . no story-books at all; no amusements. Dancing of any description was anathema. Playing-cards were the Devil's pasteboards. The theater, of course, or anything that remotely smacked of the theater,

was of the very brood of hell. On one occasion, when Ardarroch was thronged with the Glasgow Fair holiday-makers, she had ventured to attend a penny-geggie, or show-booth. She had been sore skelped for it. Aye, an austere life, my masters.

Fifteen years of tyranny, of loneliness, and heart-hunger, and repression, and frequent violent correction, threw into gorgeous relief the wonderful new life that opened up before her. There is no such inviolate happiness as hero-worship at just about fifteen.

Donald often joined her among the flowers, for even a conscientious minister may put in a good deal of time on his garden. No manual occupation is more favorable to mulling over a sermon than weeding. But it is only for those of the old dispensation, who are independent of the paper and speak from the pulpit as man to man. Of such was Donald Strachan, or he would never have been called to Ardarroch.

Morag studied him earnestly. When he went to work in moody silence, then she knew he was at his sermon, and she must not interrupt. But when he came out whistling 'Bonnie Dundee,' and broke off to fling her the cheeriest sort of greeting, aye, sometimes looked as if only keeping mind of his ministerial dignity prevented him from jumping over the gooseberry bushes, then she entered into living comradeship, precious beyond anything she had ever known. Donald was always towardly. He did not treat her as a child, however he might

regard her . . . or, at least, he came down from his pedestal, and met her on common ground. For one thing, he knew as little about gardens as she did, and they must needs learn together; and in this matter she could hold her own. She even ventured on a rare occasion to boss him about a bit, when she found him tying up a rose in clumsy fashion, or mistaking a precious seedling for a weed.

‘Tut! Tut! Maister Strachan! That’s no way at a’ to go about it. See here; just you leave it to me.’

Or: ‘Fegs! Can ye no tell the differ atween a foxglove and a docken?’

But she was ashamed of herself when she realized what she was doing.

Then there were books. Souter McAllister disapproved of novels; but what could he say if it was the minister lent them to her?

Not Barrie yet. She tried him, but turned aside in favor of more exotic adventures.

‘He’s ower common, Maister Strachan, so to speak. This here Thrums might weel be just Ardarroch.’

‘It is,’ said Donald.

But in the pages of Sir Walter Scott she entered a world of splendid romance, and moved among knights who tossed off gallant deeds of derring-do, as a mere matter of course, before the eyes of fair ladies, or to their glory, and made the whole earth beautiful.

And she had just entered this world of splendid romance, and was still panting a little in its more

rarefied atmosphere, when Donald himself, who, of course, in the heart of her, she knew must have been perfectly at home there, tossed off a gallant deed of derring-do . . . every bit as gallant, she considered it, as any feat of the Disinherited Knight . . . and that before her very eyes. A hopeless, futile effort it was that he made; yet the brave thing to do.

Aye, it was no mere world of make-believe, this world of splendid romance.

They were working together in the garden, she and Donald, with the shining sea sweeping far out beneath; and never a hint of anything to disturb their serenity. It was a perfect calm. Not a ripple broke the surface of the water, save inshore where it reached the sand. Two men pulled listlessly up the Loch in a small boat, arousing her scorn by their erratic rowing. A few gulls floated motionless on outspread wings. Now and then one would drop swift as a stone into the water with scarcely a splash, and, rising again, soar lazily into mid-air. A somnolent enchantment brooded over everything. Nature seemed to be asleep.

Suddenly, the quiet was broken by the boatmen's voices raised in anger. The sound carried distinctly over the water on the still air. It seemed like the profaning of the sacred peace of a sanctuary. They were fighting, and the boat rocked appallingly under the struggle. A man rose to his feet, swayed drunkenly for a moment, tugging an oar from the rowlock. The little boat went over.

It all happened in a moment. Before Morag had even time to shout, Donald, to her startled eyes, just seemed to soar over the little green gate. He was on the beach, his jacket discarded, kicking off his shoes. He was in the water, heading out with long powerful strokes.

'Ye canna reach him . . . ye canna reach him!' sobbed Morag in a very tumult of excitement, admiration, and fear. But, of course, he never heeded.

A boat! Donald had no boat as yet. She was off to the bakery, shouting for Gavin Leitch. Never had she run so fast. It was away beyond the pier. Gavin was out on the instant. Together, they rushed his wee coble into the water. Morag held the rudder-lines. She was breathing in deep painful gasps.

As they rounded the pier, she saw a black head above the surface. It was ever so far away. It disappeared, and the sea smiled quietly above. Again the head rose out of the water, moving aimlessly. Another black dot was moving slowly toward it. Now that the pier was cleared, she could see it. That was Donald. A cold hand seemed to close around her heart. The sea became suddenly sinister and relentless, the bonnie queenly sea. She was strong, and she clutched at life.

Morag was crying on God to help. She had a fierce faith in God; but she never took her eyes off the figures in the water. Even she could tell that Donald was tiring. He was hampered with his

clothes. His swimming was more labored every moment.

'O God, dinna let him droon . . . dinna let him droon . . . dinna let him droon . . .' over and over again.

It was Donald Strachan she meant.

Gavin was doing his best. He was a strong man; and every tug at the oars brought a grunt out of him. But, oh, how slowly the distance narrowed! Donald still struggled outward, but the water closed quietly over the other man's head. It was too late.

They picked up Donald Strachan, and they took the dead man's comrade, who remained clinging to the upturned boat; and they searched long for the victim, but the sea would not give him back.

It troubled Morag for a time, this quiet-smiling sea that killed a man and made no sign, that closed over his head forever, and sang softly as before. But she could not call the sea cruel. Every one knows it is dangerous to fight in an open boat. The fault was not with the sea. Few days had passed before her trust was completely restored.

As for Donald Strachan!

Oh, Donald was haloed with a golden glow. She had known he was like that, of course. She could have told it. She needed no such incident to prove it. He was sib to these gallant knights who condescended, like the sun, to shed light and warmth on the lives of even humble maidens. In such light and warmth Morag's soul burst into bloom like one of her own roses.

CHAPTER IX

THE PASTORAL CIRCUIT

BEFORE long Donald Strachan was a familiar figure in Ardarroch, almost as if he belonged there . . . had been there for years. A real hunk of old Scotland, rugged, rough-hewn, but redeemed by a certain rich vein of Scottish humor and tenderness. A man's man, a fine, upstanding, well-regarded man, wholesome and fighting-fit, who would rise early of a morning to plunge into the cold crystal waters of the Loch, in which none but the Viking breed dared linger, and swim doggedly out around the nearest fishing coble, and blow earnestly the while he towed himself, and sit down to a great bowl of hot porridge . . . an eminently frugal but filling breakfast.

He dressed ever in a suit of very rough Bannockburn tweed of a dark gray. Serviceable material, that, for one whose everyday suit is at best a biennial. Only the waistcoat was of clerical cut, fitting closely around the conventional dog-collar. And even this was a concession.

Old Fergus Carmichael had encouraged him in such tastes. He never could see why the clergy should be a caste apart, distinguished by a somewhat homely uniform at that.

'It's a disconcerting fact,' he would say; 'but you'll never get close to humankind if you insist on

emphasizing your profession otherwise than just by the kindness of your heart. They will shut up like clams at the sight of you. I've never quite decided whether it's an exaggerated respect for the cloth or mere distaste, though I have my suspicions; but neither attitude makes for comfort or candor.'

At the flat black hat Mr. Carmichael drew the dead-line.

'If ye produce a flat black hat,' he had said with a twinkle, 'old as I am, I'll . . . I'll play hoops with it.'

There were those in the village who looked askance at Donald's nondescript gray garb. It was not quite seemly for the minister. But what would you have? His precious blacks and tall silk hat must needs be kept for the Sabbath day. His stipend was a hundred and sixty pounds a year . . . if the Sustentation Fund ran to it.

A fighting mystic was Donald. The urges of God had visited him in no artificial or morbid ecstasy, but out in the open, in the Grampian solitudes, where a man may think deeply and see clearly. They had appealed to the senses of his rugged and healthy manhood. They had carried conviction with them.

This conviction he longed to share with others . . . Archie Parlane, for instance. Archie had long been numbered among what they called 'the lapsed masses'; but Donald found his name on the roll, and saw no reason to ignore him . . . saw the more reason, indeed, to seek him out.

'Aye,' said Archie lightly, 'I used to be pretty

reg'lar at the kirk, but I don't seem to go in for that sort of thing nowadays . . . much. I've, what ye might say, lost interest . . . never gotten much oot of it . . .'

And he smiled. He smiled disarmingly, as folk are wont to do when they talk like that.

Donald took instant exception to the smile.

'Man,' he said sternly, 'this is a poor occasion for levity. Is it not a fact that you stood up of your own free will, and burdened your soul with certain very solemn vows before the eyes o' God and men . . . vows to cleave to the kirk, and do all in your power to promote its prosperity and its peace? Have ye no shame to be forsworn? You're less a man than you were. Why should it amuse you? . . .'

The smile died on Archie's lips.

'I never just regairded it in that way,' he admitted.

Donald snorted impatiently.

'No, I don't suppose you did. It's aye the way o' renegades to take their apostasy lightly . . . as though good faith were a matter of little moment. Why? . . . In God's name, tell me why. I can understand how a man comes to lose his visions, his enthusiasms, his sense of God and the larger universe, his high and sacred ideals. I can understand that, just as I can understand how he comes to waste his substance in riotous living. That's easy. What I can't understand is why he should make a jest of it.'

‘Ye’ve an unco’ violent way o’ putting things, meenister,’ said Archie admiringly. He was no advocate of half-measures himself. ‘Ye dinna leave a man much chance to save his face. . . . I’ve half a mind to have another try at the kirk-going, though, honestly, I never can see the common-sense o’ such a proceeding. Haply now, ye may be able . . .’

He was prepared to discuss this matter at some length.

‘There’s none,’ said Donald readily. Archie stared aghast. This man had simply cut off his cherished flow of argument at the meter. ‘. . . Not what you might call common-sense. Common-sense, I take it, is just worldly wisdom. It’s the highest common factor o’ the intelligence of the masses; and, without any wish to be cynical, that’s no very high. Ye’ll find common-sense expressed in all sorts o’ humdrum proverbs: “Look before ye leap,” for instance . . . excellent advice in many cases; but how far would the world have gone if there never had been a man ready to leap without looking and take a chance on it? “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.” There’s common-sense for you. And it was put on the lips of the Devil in the great drama of Job, and it’s false as the Devil’s own heart. There are many things a man will not give up even to save his life: honor, love of country, religious or personal liberty, faith in God. Common-sense! “Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.” That’s the very sum and substance o’ common-sense; and it’s the phi-

losophy o' the beasts that perish. What have you and I to do wi' common-sense, Parlane? Tell me that. There's no common-sense in poetry, music, heroism, self-sacrifice. What we need, to glorify life, is something o' that divine foolishness that confounds the wisdom o' this world, something of vision, inspiration . . . uncommon sense, if ye like.'

'Aye,' said Archie, shrewdly jogged despite himself; 'noo ye're *talking*.'

This sort of thing appealed to him hugely.

'Never heed the sermon, if ye dinna like it. I've heard a when myself that scunnered me.' Donald allowed his eyes to roam at large a space down the Loch to the open sea. 'But it's a belittling thing . . . aye, it's an awful thing, to get earth-bound and let go the big spiritual horizons. It dwarfs a man . . . and the worst of it is, he seldom realizes it.'

Archie Parlane appeared again in the Free Kirk . . . to the amazement of all beholders; but what did he care? His soul was knit to that of Donald.

'He doesna dangle a man ower the pit till he can smell brimstone,' he explained. 'But, fegs! if ye're a bit o' a worm, he'll speedily divest ye o' any doubt on the subject. And that's the man for me.'

The reclaiming of Archie was enough in itself to give Donald a name.

But despite his steadfastness in the faith, and all his real respect for the traditions of an older genera-

tion, it was to be expected that on occasion the young *padre* would surprise folk.

Naturally, he began his ministry by making a systematic round of calls upon his flock. None of your haphazard methods for Donald Strachan. He intimated from the pulpit when and where he was going to call, and there and then he called. By the time he had completed the round there was a violent difference of opinion about him. Indeed, he was soon regarded in that little country clachan by a few literalists and fundamentalists pretty much as the Master he served was regarded in Galilee and Judæa by wise and respected men, deeply versed in the Law. . . . Still, the common people heard him gladly. And, when the housewives of Ardarroch expected a visit of him, they redd up their houses as though it were spring, and the family were thrust into unaccustomed clothes and mustered to a unit.

When he visited Willie Bannerman, the pier-master, it was just at the time that worthy's shrewd and roving mind had begun to question the faith of his fathers, and the magic word 'agnosticism' had fastened on his imagination. Willie was possessed of a dark fear, strangely mingled with spiritual pride.

'I was just on the verge o' making ye a visit masel', dominie,' he began, 'in order to return my communion token. I misdoubt I canna use it.'

No one might partake of the Sacrament in Ardarroch without producing a small metal token

as evidence of his good standing as a member of the kirk.

Donald silently awaited the explanation of so momentous a step. Willie, he knew, was very advanced. Scandal had it that he read most of the output of the Rationalist press, and, whiles, dabbled in strange cults.

‘Ye see, I’m gey troubled about my soul.’

Donald nodded hearty approval.

‘Then, laddie, you’re upon the right road. It’s when a man is quite complacent I tremble for the consequences.’

Willie’s eyes protruded a trifle. He was apt to be morbidly introspective, and his soul bothered him considerably from time to time. Those to whom he gave his confidences were wont to express something in the way of horror.

There was an occasion, for instance, when he had gotten it into his head that forgiveness is granted on offenses only up to seventy times seven. With solemn foreboding, he had endeavored to form an estimate on his own account, and had failed. He sought advice of Hector Pitcaithly, and dropped such hints of a fearful past, and the perilous position in which he considered himself to stand, that Hector, honest soul, carried around a look of vicarious anxiety for days.

‘Fower hundred and ninety breaches o’ the Decalogue,’ said Willie, ‘may seem at first sight a liberal allowance; but, hech, sirs! a man commits a wheen sins in the course o’ a lifetime, be he never so

circumspect, and I was never the one to be over careful!’

Now it was a growing surmise, fostered of his heretical excursions, that his spiritual advisers in the past had misled him on many matters. At least, he was not just sure.

‘Ye see, sir,’ he explained, ‘I’ve got my eyes opened to the fact that there is considerable question, to say the least of it, regarding muckle we have been taught as fact. It’s not all cut and dried, by any means, as we’ve been led to believe; and, until I’m right satisfied, I’m what might be called an agnostic.’

There, it was out! Willie waited for the heavens to fall, but they did not fall. Donald was dreadfully placid . . . almost insultingly placid. His was no way in which to take a man’s daring distrust of the cosmos. But then Donald had been through it all himself . . . gripped with black doubts that had never even approached his parishioner. Donald had suffered in the soul of him, as Willie apparently was not suffering.

‘I presume, Willie,’ said he, ‘you imagine your agnosticism sets you a little apart from the rest of us . . . gives you a certain superiority . . .’

Willie offered an unconvincing gesture of dissent.

‘Well, listen here. Agnosticism is no more than a non-committal attitude to some o’ the great fundamental questions of life. Laddie, we are engendered and brought forth and cradled in mystery, and compassed wi’ miracle, though we don’t

aye realize it. Every day we are making light o' mysteries, foolishly enough; and then something stirs us shrewdly . . . "a sunset touch, a fancy frae a flower bell, some one's death" . . . and, behold, there are portents in the sky we would like to read, and voices in the wind we would like to recognize, and canna. We are all agnostics on the greater part o' the questions concerning God, and man, and life, and the universe. We canna help ourselves. We simply do not know. If your agnosticism just means that you are growing conscious o' your colossal ignorance o' these mysteries, groping after more light, as of sincerity, and in the meantime doing your little best to live up to the bit glimmer o' light you have, then I bid you God-speed. You shall not fail of your reward.'

'Thank 'ee kindly,' Willie murmured, with some humility.

'But hearken unto this. There are matters upon which no man can afford to be agnostic . . . matters on which no honest man has any real doubt in his soul. They are like Euclid's axioms; they need no proof. I'll tell you some o' them: the worth o' moral integrity, the reverence that is due to womanhood, the imperative of cleanness and honor and truth and justice. Aye, if your agnosticism ever comes to be just a bit excuse for lowering the standard and slackening the moral fiber, I can inform you, here and now, it's no honest doubt, but an accursed thing that savors o' hell.'

Willie quailed a moment before this grim pre-

ceptor, who rose, and towered over him the while he spoke, as though in dread menace. But Donald sank back in his chair again with a smile.

'Aye, aye, Willie. But I've no great fear for you. I ken finely the regard in which you are held in this community. . . . Keep your token. It is borne in upon me that your questioning will but lead you to the light.'

Thus did Donald take the agnostic to his heart. But what a thing to encourage in the Free Kirk of Scotland! Willie, you may be sure, did not keep silence regarding the dark fears which had beset him, and the way the minister had banished these fears. There were those in Ardarroch who thought Willie had gotten off too easily . . . were conscious of a growing surmise that even Donald Strachan had some reason to be afraid. It set the heads shaking in the village, and the tongues wagging, with a vengeance. What sort of priest was this that let a self-confessed infidel keep his token, and welcomed him to the communion of the faithful?

Then there was the occasion when he visited Andra McKelvie, and was invited ben the house to hear the McKelvie babe say her prayers.

'Noo speak up, Elspeth, and be verra careful. Here's the meenister listenin' to ye.'

Just as if the minister were more important than . . . but, of course, Mrs. McKelvie meant no irreverence.

A great wistfulness came over the face of Donald, as the child knelt by her little cot, shut her eyes, and folded her hands.

‘Noo I lay me doon to sleep,
I pray the Lord ma soul to keep.
If I should dee afore I wake,
I pray the Lord ma soul to take . . .’

Gathering her in his arms, he kissed her, and tucked her under the clothes, and murmured over her:

‘The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee . . . and aye give thee peace.’

Donald must often have heard that little bedside prayer, said it himself, indeed, in his tender years. For the first time it suddenly appeared grotesque . . . unnatural.

‘Isn’t it queer,’ he remarked, as they repaired to the front room, ‘that such a prayer should almost invariably be placed on the lips o’ a bairn?’

‘Queer!’

Andra and his wife were astonished. Every child in the land had lisped that prayer from its earliest days.

‘Why should a bairn be fashing her little head about the eventuality o’ her decease? It’s a sorrowful possibility, no doubt; but, gin it should happen, what has she to fear? I take it, there’s little call for anxiety regarding that innocent wee soul. Of such is the Kingdom o’ Heaven.’

This was the first hint that Donald Strachan was tainted with the Arminian heresy. John Calvin might well have turned in his grave. That Ardaroch should be harboring a minister who cast doubt

upon the fundamental fact that some bairns are elected to eternal punishment, just as surely as some are elected to life, from the foundation of the world! More was bound to be heard of this.

Farmer Sneddon of Tighnaheugh solemnly shook his head when he was informed of it. It was not the sort of thing that could be simply hushed up, even by Andra McKelvie; and Sneddon anticipated the worst.

Souter McAllister was grievously distressed, but inclined to make allowances.

'He's a young man, wi' far to go and muckle to learn. We maun just hope for the best.'

'I sore mistrust,' said Tighnaheugh, 'he has leanings toward the U.P.s.'

For the U.P.s had edited Calvin quite ruthlessly. They accepted the Westminster Confession of Faith only with considerable reservations. They had indeed passed what they called a Declaratory Act to that effect. They simply refused to be linked forever with that infallible company of theologians who had lived two hundred years before and drawn up an infallible creed. A contumacious brood they were. And this was the body with which it was decided that the Free Kirk should unite! There were Free Kirkers who frankly stated they would sooner burn in hell forever. Quite reckless they were about it.

It was no light thing in Ardarroch these days for a Free Kirk minister to be suspected of a U.P. trend.

But more was to come, and that in the very presence of the Free Kirk session, who were met to examine and receive any young applicants for church membership.

Morag McAllister was the sole candidate on this occasion; and the souter, lest he might be betrayed into any leniency toward his own offspring . . . a betrayal which had never happened in his experience . . . felt that it was incumbent on him to absent himself. He was thus spared some harrowing revelations.

Morag had been unremitting in her attendance at the Bible Study Class, and the minister himself had encouraged her to take the decisive step. But now, fronting the assembled pillars of the kirk, she was seized with misgiving. They seemed so grim, and contrary, and fearsome. As a matter of fact, there was a particularly solemn expression they were wont to don for such occasions, just as the minister might don a pulpit gown.

Donald strove to reassure her. He seemed, himself, rather more than usually gentle and encouraging.

‘Morag,’ he said, ‘we are pleased to see you have come forward to consecrate your life to the service of the Master. I have met with you, and explained to you the meaning of the Sacrament; and I am satisfied. Perhaps some of the session, however, may desire to put a question.’

Perhaps!

As if it were thinkable that one could be received

into membership of the Free Kirk, without awful searching by the elders, in solemn conclave assembled.

'Name the twelve disciples,' said Gavin Leitch of the bakery.

That was easy. No one could stick Morag on the usual test questions. About the age of four years, she had learned enough to exclude Mark and Luke, who were mere evangelists, though they were aye ready to jump into the list if you were not careful. The disciples were duly named, from: The first, Simon, who is also called Peter, down to Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

And she glanced at Donald, and Donald smiled and nodded. Gavin would have done the same: Gavin, for an elder, was quite human. But a smile from Donald utterly eclipsed anything Gavin could ever hope to supply.

Sneddon caught the smile, though, and scowled in grim disapproval. Such amenity was sore out of place in a session meeting.

'Can ye quote for us a bit o' the twenty-third psalm?' queried Hector Pitcaithly, the herd. It was Hector's unfailing demand on such an occasion.

He had himself a singularly beautiful rendering, which he found wondrous comforting:

'The Lord is my herd; nae want shall befa' me.

He bringeth me tae lie amang green howes; He airts me
atowre by the lown waters.

He waukens my way-gaun soul . . .

Na! though I gang through the dead-mirk-dale, e'en there
shall I dread nae scathin' . . .'

Morag was able to quote the more familiar version with acceptance.

Andra McKelvie switched suddenly to the Shorter Catechism.

‘Noo, Morag, haply ye’ll tell us: What are the reasons annexed tae . . . let me see . . . the Second Commandment?’

Morag took a deep breath, and disburdened herself in the curious monotone which seems ever to attach to the repetition of the Catechism.

‘The reasons annexed tae the Second Commandment are: God’s sovereignty over us, His propriety in us, and the zeal He hath to His ain worship.’

‘Fine, Morag! . . . Fine!’ said Andra, beaming all over.

Andra would ever do his duty, and prod, and tap, and listen, like a good surgeon; but he confidently expected to find that all was well, and it warmed his heart to have his confidence vindicated. That was the sort of man he was.

But this was the point in the examination for which Farmer Sneddon had primed himself. With Machiavellian cunning, he proposed to open up, as it were by a mere chance question put to Morag, the grave question of Predestination and its bearing on the damnation of infants. Not that Sneddon had any particular animosity to infants, as such; but Donald’s words over the McKelvie babe had stuck in his throat. They were heretical words, and most reprehensible. Indeed, Donald’s whole attitude to the accepted faith was questionable, to

say the least of it. If the minister could be brought, here, before the kirk session, to commit himself, then matters might be brought to a head. Morag was of little account. It was really Donald who was on trial.

He arose, and cleared his throat.

‘We’ll just hae another delve in the Shorter Catechism, Morag. Haply ye can inform us: Did God leave all mankind to perish in a state o’ sin and misery?’

And he cast a significant glance at the minister. It was almost as if he had added: ‘Noo just hearken to this.’

Morag was in her element. She could have repeated the Shorter Catechism backwards, if required.

‘God, having out of His mere good pleasure, frae all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant o’ grace, to deliver them out of a state o’ sin and misery, and to bring them into a state o’ salvation by a Redeemer.’

‘Great words!’ said Sneddon unctuously. ‘Aye, aye . . . having elected *some*, ye’ll note, out o’ His mere good pleasure . . . Noo, Morag, regarding the non-elect o’ them that participated in Adam’s Fall? . . . Supposing, for example, it were a babe . . .?’

It was evidently a question; but it did not appear in the Shorter Catechism . . . at least, in that form; nor was the meaning of the question apparent to Morag’s bewildered soul.

She cast down her eyes, and remained silent.

'Tuts!' said the farmer. 'Let's hae an answer. Is there any authority for believin' that a' babes are in a state o' salvation?'

Morag was understood to mutter:

'I'm no richt sure.'

'Speak up.'

'I dinna ken.'

Sneddon was grim as any Torquemada.

'How auld are ye, lassie?'

'Sixteen, come January.'

'And ye hae searched the Scriptures, and learned your Catechism, and come forward to join the kirk, and ye canna tell ...'

Morag was in tears.

Andra McKelvie was obviously vexed and uncomfortable. Gavin Leitch eyed the farmer's bulky frame in solemn speculation, as though wondering just where a punch would do most good. Donald was fidgeting in his seat.

'Beware how ye come unprepared,' said the Grand Inquisitor, 'lest, eating and drinking, unworthily, ye eat and drink damnation to yoursel', no discerning the Lord's body ... First Corinthians, eleven and twenty-nine.'

Morag had no need to be reminded of these solemn words. The old apostle's adjuration has prevented many an honest and worthy disciple from joining the kirk.

'I'm thinking I'm ower young yet to come forward,' she stammered.

But Donald was on his feet. His face was white, and a queer fire was in his eyes.

‘No, no, no,’ he said. And he said it with such conviction and force that Sneddon collapsed into a seat, as if his feet had been kicked from under him. ‘There be many very capable o’ discerning the Lord, who are not haply versed in deep and disputable matters o’ theology . . . and *vice versa*. Sit down, and rest ye, Morag, and hearken to me; and will the session kindly hearken as well, for this is a matter that comes very close to my heart. I thoroughly agree wi’ Tighnaheugh that a young communicant should search the Scriptures and ken the Catechism, and I am persuaded that Morag is familiar with both. But I want it clearly understood, once and for all, that this has nothing whatsoever to do with following the Master.’

A gasp of astonishment interrupted him. If the minister had smitten Sneddon violently on the point of the nose, he could not have created a greater sensation. Morag had dried her tears, and was regarding him fixedly, with big round eyes, as one from another world. The session also were regarding him fixedly, but in a different way altogether . . . or, perhaps, as one from an entirely different other world. Verily, whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad. Donald was mad . . . mad as a March hare. Never had such a statement been made in their hearing. It was almost incredible that it could have been made, yet

they must needs accept the evidence of their own senses.

‘Morag,’ said Donald more calmly, ‘will ye name for us again the twelve disciples?’

Glad to vindicate herself in some sort, Morag did so.

‘These,’ said Donald, ‘were the first communicants. Of that there can be no question in the world. They were chosen and accepted by the Master Himself; and they were the first to sit down quite naturally at the Lord’s table. What were their qualifications? Go right back, and just see what Jesus of Nazareth Himself demanded for discipleship. Ye will find it an illuminating experience. Come now; ye’re all familiar wi’ the Gospel narratives.’

Gavin Leitch relaxed a little the tensivity of his mien. Hector Pitcaithly nodded approvingly. A smile, almost of sacred joy, began to dawn on the face of Andra McKelvie. Here they were, for the moment, on solid, undebatable ground.

‘Think ye they were deeply versed in the Scriptures? Some of them were fishermen. I doubt if they could even read. A chapter now and then, heard in the synagogue, was all they knew of the Word o’ God. Think ye they kenned the Catechism? The Catechism was never compiled till many centuries after they were dead and gone, and there are bits in it, haply, they might never have endorsed. Had they a creed? Aye; they had a creed that naught could shake; but it bore little

resemblance at the outset to what we call the Apostles' Creed. Let's just see, now. Morag, will you repeat for us the Creed?'

Morag sprang to her feet, all aglow.

'I believe in God, the Father Almighty . . .' she began readily; and she went through the Apostles' Creed without a stumble.

'That,' said Donald, 'is, roughly speaking, what the disciples came to believe, after many years of fellowship with their Master. But think ye, when they were first accepted by Jesus, they believed in the Fatherhood of God or the Divinity of Christ? Not a bit of it. What, again, could they wit o' the Immaculate Conception or the Virgin Birth? Nothing whatsoever. Could they foresee the tragedy of Calvary and all that it signified? Think ye they believed in the Resurrection o' the body and the Life Everlasting? Not they. Such matters had never entered their heads.'

Donald stood for a moment in silence. Sneddon moistened dry lips with the tip of his tongue, and Menzies nervously tugged at his beard. They could not surmise what was coming. They only knew this man was questioning every doctrine they believed essential to salvation. Heresy could go no farther.

'How much of our Creed then did they have?' demanded the minister. 'Naught but what every Jew at the time believed. A sorry equipment, ye might say. Yet they were His disciples . . . Christians beyond the shadow of a doubt. What was it

made them Christians? That's what I'm trying to get at. What were their qualifications to become His disciples, and take their places at the Lord's table? I'll tell you. And will ye try to keep mind of it, for this is the Christian essential? They heard Him talk, and they saw the sort of life He lived . . . aye, and the way He was dealing with the poor, and the needy, and the sinful, and the heavy-laden. They saw in Him somewhat they could not help but reverence and love. Never man spake like this man, lived like this man, served his kind like this man. Here was a Master o' men. . . . One to be followed to the ends o' all the earth. And when He asked them to follow, they just up and followed Him, learned of Him, began to model their lives on His. They believed in Him personally, the Man, Christ Jesus. That's discipleship. That's Christianity . . . that, and nothing more. That's enough to go on with. *But*, gin ye once take this step, ye're going to learn many things of Him. Haply, in the end, ye may be able to say the whole Apostles' Creed . . . aye, and, by the grace of God, to mean every word ye say.'

Such an argument was a little hard to meet adequately on the spur of the moment.

Morag was duly accepted into the Free Kirk fold without further question. Nevertheless, Donald remained, to Sneddon of Tighnaheugh at least, under sore suspicion. /

CHAPTER X

CORDS OF A MAN

DONALD was well aware of the distrust which circulated through his towardly little community, as a man may be aware of a cold draft in an otherwise comfortable room . . . distrust of his modern way of looking at things; distrust of his attitude to the Bible and the creeds; distrust of the very God he worshiped.

‘For my part,’ Lang Peter would say, ‘I never can hold wi’ a meenister that makes the road to heaven ower easy.’

He did not blame his people. He knew the grim men with whom he had to deal. There was a time when he himself would have been just as distrustful of any one who spoke as he had spoken. He well recalled how he had fought to retain his own early prejudices and crude beliefs, as though in very resentment of the dawn that paled his treasured stars.

How could they know, brought up as they had been under the old dispensation, and violently suspicious of all change, that the Hebrew idea of God had grown and enlarged through many generations, as the race developed out of childhood to mystic maturity? Their very reverence for Holy Writ was against it. They believed, as he himself had once believed, that God had dictated the Bible word for word, and the cursing-psalms were God-inspired,

and the atrocities committed in His name by early judges and kings of Israel had as much validity as the Sermon on the Mount. The very word 'evolution' was novel and suspect.

Sneddon of Tighnaheugh, beyond doubt, drew handsomely on the cursing-psalms in the matter of the U.P.s . . . and gave God glory.

'Let their eyes be dark, that they see not. Make their loins continually to shake. Let them be blotted from the book of life. Let them become as dung upon the earth . . .'

Aye, aye. Solemn words, these, and powerful to scourge the troublers of Zion!

To Donald they were merely hideous, the wrong-headed vituperations of a still uncivilized and unenlightened people.

He knew how his little flock had been brought up in the fear of God, who visiteth the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. The love of God was mentioned; but it was not dwelt upon, lest, haply, it be exploited. He knew they had been brought up in the doctrine of original sin, and clung to it as to a birthright . . . camsterie folk, with the flare of a hot-glowing hell in their eyes when they looked ahead. They took to themselves, even when they were doing their little best according to their lights, any prophet's scathing denunciation of Israel in her most corrupt days; dragged it out of its context, hypnotizing themselves into the belief that it was addressed to them personally.

‘Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the crown of the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.’

Reading such words, Andra McKelvie, decent soul, would bow the head.

‘It’s a fearsome truth, and no mistake. Thou God seest me. And, when yon awful day will come as a thief in the night, who can stand?’

It could not occur to him that such words, applied to him, were, to say the least, extravagant. Yet all that a man could do in the way of working out his salvation with fear and trembling, Andra was undoubtedly doing.

And they regarded their bairns as teeming receptacles of original sin, impressed on them the wrath to come, put the fear of death in them, aye, dealt with them as they imagined the Mosaic God dealt with a quaking people. To the young prophet it was pernicious, rather blasphemous. He could not away with it.

Face to face with these dark doctrines, kindled of a certain ignorance and superstition, yet faithfully tended by his people as the very fires of God, Donald went back to those dreadful days and nights in Glasgow, when he had fought like a man beset on a stricken field; had wrestled, like Jacob at Peniel, and been conquered . . . by God Himself; had sought a blessing, and received it.

And his blessing was a verity on which he could build his whole philosophy of life. Nothing could shake it. It had its roots in the one great truth that gripped the heart of a prophet primeval: God made man in His own image . . . and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. His own image! Hast thou not known; hast thou not heard; hath it not been told thee from the beginning: that human nature at its best is God . . . that human righteousness for righteousness' sake, wherever it is undefiled and does not count the cost, is not merely godlike, it is God; that human truth for truth's sake, defiant of all consequences, is not merely godlike, it is God; that human love, perfect self-forgetful human love, is not merely godlike, it is God.

The Overlord of the universe is no monstrous incomprehensible Moloch, hovering in awful menace over the unprofitable children of men. His is the father-heart, more love-worthy than all in human nature we have learned to love . . . terrible only in the sense in which Love itself is terrible. Donald found it easy to believe that the only true Man the world has ever known, the strongest and the kindest Man, was God Himself, robing Himself in flesh of man to lead men back to God.

And they troubled him not at all who said out of a certain perplexity:

'We cannot understand. We want to simplify the matter. We want to affirm that Jesus of Nazareth was a man, the greatest of men, the noblest

of men, the perfect man, if you like, but still only a man . . .’

‘All right,’ Donald would say; ‘affirm it. It’s an excellent way in which to approach God. It’s the way the disciples began. You will find that manhood towers up and up, till in the perfect man it touches, and reveals, and *is* Almighty God. But turn to Jesus, just as to the perfect man, if ye like. He will not lead you astray.’

Ardarroch did not like to have Donald speak in that fashion. Ardarroch spoke of Three distinct Persons in the Godhead, and cited the Shorter Catechism. Ardarroch, though it would have denied it hotly if challenged with it, actually worshiped three Gods. Aye; they believed in the Nazarene, but He was entirely overshadowed for all practical purposes by the Awful Being, whose dwelling was in clouds and thick darkness, and before whom they were dust and ashes. They did not understand tenderness. To Him they never attributed love and the sorrow of love. Donald was putting the emphasis in the wrong place. To Ardarroch, his was unfamiliar, and therefore unwelcome doctrine. For that very reason he must needs harp on it. He made a manifesto of the faith that was in him.

And it was this very manifesto, simple truth and familiar enough to multitudes all a world over now, but incredibly strange to these dour theologians in Ardarroch, which definitely alienated several pillars of the wee kirk, subtly fed the flames of

revolt against all modernism, and, to Donald's dismay, bred divisions and hatreds.

He took his text from Hosea:

'I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.'

And he proceeded to show how a stern old prophet was brought to understand these strong and tender human bonds the Almighty uses to bind His errant people to His heart.

It was in the eighth century B.C., the time of Israel's decadence . . . when vice was rampant in the land, something like a state of anarchy prevailed, and all the laws of God and man were trampled ruthlessly underfoot . . . Hosea appeared, preaching the wrath of God.

'I, Jehovah, have a quarrel with my people, for there is no troth, nor leal love, nor knowledge of God in the land. . . . I will visit upon them their ways, and their deeds will I requite unto them. . . . Israel is defiled. . . . Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone. . . . A wind hath wrapt them up in her skirts, and they shall be put to shame. . . . Upon them will I pour out my wrath like water. . . . I will be the scourge of them all; and the pride of Israel shall be humbled to his face.'

Sneddon settled down to enjoy himself. This looked like the beginning of a sermon after his own heart. He could respect a God who spoke like that.

But alas! Something happened to Hosea that changed his whole outlook upon life.

Hosea, it seemed, was wedded to a wanton woman named Gomer, and she sinned against his love. She left him, to play the harlot with other lovers, sank lower and lower, and finally was sold into slavery.

Miss Turnbull sat up very prim and straight in her pew, the picture of stark disapproval.

'Sic a like thing to mention in a public discourse! . . . And weans present, and a'!'

But no matter. Donald just went right on.

Hosea still loved this woman, sought her sorrowfully, and went to great lengths to redeem her. But he found himself rather short of thunderbolts when he came to deal with Gomer. That was the curious thing about it. He seemed to have lost his gift of violent denunciation just when it was most needed. He found her in the slave-market, bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver, an homer of barley, and a measure of wine . . . a tremendous price for any poor prophet to pay . . . and restored her to her former position in his home. Was this mawkishness? . . . weakness? . . . sin? Hosea felt that, in acting as he did, he was fulfilling the wish of God . . . as, of course, he was.

What took place later in this matter no one knows. But, out of his own experience, Hosea had learned something of the heart of God. God, you see, made man in His own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the love of God, sinned against as it may be, cannot be feebler and less enduring than human love.

McAllister was already restive. He had read the Book of Hosea, and gathered from it naught of this. What Donald was saying of God was monstrous in its implication. Womanish weakness, Peter would have called it. No, no; Jehovah is mighty to rip out of His affections any one at all that fails by one jot or one tittle to maintain the letter o' the law. Aye, and a right-thinking human must needs do the same. Peter, poor soul, knew very little of love.

Ah, well! Donald persisted in his exposition, all heedless of the way his flock regarded it.

Gomer became to the prophet a sort of personification of his people . . . her dereliction of their dereliction. They, too, had plighted their troth, owed their God leal love; and they had gone away after strange gods and evil living, and were stricken, and in want, and enslaved. Hosea knew, out of his own experience, how God felt about it.

And the whole burden of his message was changed, transfigured. The prophet had a deeper insight, a clearer vision, a new inspiration. He spoke for God, knowing God better than ever he had known Him.

'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?' . . . Wrath melted into yearning pity. . . . 'O Israel, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning mist, as the dew that goeth early away. I taught them to go, taking them in my arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.'

Almost chanting, Donald declaimed the great passages that had seized upon his imagination.

'I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely. I will be as the dew unto Israel.

'I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death.

'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'

Sneddon, in his pew, was breathing forth threatenings and slaughters. He really believed that Donald Strachan was deliberately distorting prophecy.

'And does the man mean tae suggest,' he queried in his heart, 'that the prophet Hosea stultified himself?'

'Aye, aye,' said Donald, as though in very answer; 'Hosea revised his ideas considerably . . . just as the Apostle Paul did his . . . just as some of us here must needs revise ours.'

'Never!' breathed Sneddon and McAllister, stormily and in unison.

'That was the beginning of the Christ-prophecy,' the preacher went on.

Out of Hosea's experience, and out of all that sort of experience, there arose the definite conception of a suffering Messiah. Across the lives of godlike men they saw Him coming. The strange surmise took birth that a man like Jeremiah, say, suffering for righteousness' sake, and appealing as from a cross to the men who crucified him, showed more of the heart of God than Solomon in all his

glory; that Hosea, sorrowing over, and forgiving, and redeeming the woman he loved, was nearer to Jehovah than Saul slaying his thousands, or David his tens of thousands; that, indeed, it is not in pomp, and power, and wrath, and vengeance, God makes Himself known, but in love that agonizes to redeem. What if a man should come, demanded Isaiah, the greatest of them all, whose spirit was utterly the spirit of God!

And He came.

The Spirit of God took flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. Jesus of Nazareth came, revealing God.

‘Aye,’ said Donald in conclusion, ‘there are elements divine in ordinary women and men. Trust ye these elements. Blurred and distorted though the image o’ God may have become, it is still there. But once, and once only, was there a Man in whom there was naught else but the image of God. In Him was all of God the human heart can understand. And He was precisely the Man Hosea had foreshown, Isaiah had foreseen.

‘Have done, once and for all, with the dread forbidding God of a primitive slave-people. Get you back to Jesus of Nazareth, if ye would see God as He is. And think of God no thoughts ye canna think of the Nazarene.’

Such was Donald’s manifesto . . . the gist of it, rather: a pitiful enough transcript of his burning words and impassioned appeal, but it must suffice.

I do not know which particular heresy it repre-

sented . . . Marcionism, perhaps. There was a frightful heresy, I believe, called Marcionism, that long ago took it for granted that Jehovah of the Old Testament was a misconception.

Sneddon of Tighnaheugh took it upon himself to call a special meeting of the session about it behind his minister's back.

'Bringin' God doon almost to the level o' a dotting woman!'

'Aye,' said McAllister; 'and what does he ken about the love that suffers for a loved ane gone wrang? Tell me that. It's no love; it's naught but mere indulgence. Gin Morag failed to walk circumspectly, I'm thinking she'd be the ane to suffer. I canna abide all this talk o' love and mercy, that puts judgment and vengeance and the wrath o' God to the wa'.'

'That's right.' Sneddon's lips closed so grimly his little beard stuck out almost straight. 'This humanizin' o' the Almighty is something for which Ardarroch will not stand. Rank Unitarianism, that's what it is!'

But Sneddon and McAllister failed altogether to carry the session.

Menzies felt they maun bide their time a bit before taking any decisive steps in the matter; and Andra McKelvie agreed with him.

'He's a Bible preacher at any rate,' Andra insisted. 'He may startle ane occasionally by the conclusions he draws; but there's no getting past it that he draws them frae scriptural premises,

and I have yet to find a fallacy in his argumentation.'

Gavin Leitch was provoked at the very calling of a meeting to attack the minister in his absence. 'Hole-in-the corner business' he termed it, and in an expansive moment addressed the farmer as: 'Ye ill-natured, fashious, back-bitin' auld carle!'

The majority calmly passed a vote of confidence in their minister, admitting unashamedly that they had found the discourse not only unco comforting to the soul, but convincing to the intellect forby.

What can you do with folk like that?

But Sneddon and McAllister were gathering a small following outside the session. There was already the nucleus of a party in revolt. The kirk to all appearance was united; but a close observer might have detected cracks . . . ominous cracks, which at any strain might yawn into abysses. And the time of strain was at hand. Disintegrating influences were making themselves felt. These were stirring times; and the cloud that had been no bigger than a man's hand was already growing and darkening over the little Free Kirk of Ardarroch.

CHAPTER XI

THE SCHISMATICS

(1)

It was in the stormy days of the late nineties that Donald was elected to his pastorate; and it was not long before he realized that he had plunged into an arena of potential torment, revolution, civil war.

He could have borne with McAllister and Miss Turnbull. With a little extra effort, he might even have borne with Sneddon. In themselves, they were negligible. Never an apostle but has had his thorn in the flesh. There was Paul. He had his, and was more or less resigned to it. The trouble was much more deeply seated. Beneath the placid surface of his little clachan was a raging volcano, and red-hot lava was bubbling perilously near the point of overflow.

And all this, because at long last it had been announced that the Free Kirk of Scotland should join with the United Presbyterians. There were many who arose, vehemently to forbid the banns. Aye; they knew lots of impediments and just causes why the two should not be lawfully joined together. They raved against what they called the unholy union. They thundered against being 'unequally yoked with unbelievers.' That was a phrase sent direct from heaven. It was a lovely

phrase . . . scriptural and apt. It became a war-cry. They were children of a mother-church beyond reproach. It would be hideous misalliance. They would have no obnoxious stepfather. With loud and lasting clamor they said so, and simply declined thereafter forever to hold their peace.

For the U.P.s had lapsed into divers heresies, and, to strict Free Kirkers, they seemed to wallow in their disgrace. They actually questioned if it was necessary for all time to believe what earnest but somewhat primitive folk of long ago had believed: that the world was created in six days; that the first three chapters of Genesis and the Book of Jonah were literal history; that God, from all eternity, elected some men to be saved and others to be damned; that salvation is offered only to limited numbers of the human race; that multitudes of new born babes are lost eternally; and hell is of fire and brimstone, in which the wicked will be grilled without end.

Infidels, in short.

Many folk of course, who still clung fiercely to the stern old Scottish faith, were becoming just a little doubtful of some points: this damnation of infants, for example and in particular, who just did not happen to be among the elect from the foundation of the world. Andra McKelvie, looking on his babe, could never have pictured her, in any real sense, as hovering over Tophet. It was not in human nature to do so, though one must needs be surprised if the minister should discount the possi-

bility. The most orthodox of the Frees were loath to discuss the matter.

Cornered, they must needs assent to the doctrine.

'Oh, aye; I ken fine we would a' be damned if it wasna for the Divine grace dispensed unto the elect. The heart o' man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Aye, aye!'

But the U.P.s boldly stated their doubt; questioned Original Sin; questioned Predestination; questioned the Infallibility of the Bible; questioned if all revelation had ended in 1647 with the framing of the Westminster Confession of Faith; even granted their Synod authority to endorse certain departures from that venerable creed; became to multitudes of simple Highland folk the protagonists of all heresy.

And a majority of the Free Kirk Assembly viewed them without distaste!

Awful!

You could see how utterly irreconcilable they must be who had the traditions of the Free Kirk at heart. And it was with sickening disillusionment that such as these in Ardarroch realized that their chosen spiritual leader was tainted with U.P. heresies, and an advocate of union.

Down at the post-office might have been heard sinister mutterings of the approaching storm. The disaffected, in these days, were not always wholly sure of the points at issue, and argument was apt to take weird turns; but of their fervor there never

was any doubt. Direct action was frequently advocated.

'Aye, aye,' said Andra McKelvie on one occasion; 'but, when all's said and done, it maun be admitted the U.P.s are Christians . . . same as oor-sels.'

'That,' said Farmer Sneddon of Tighnaheugh grimly, 'I, for one, will never admit . . . never.'

Andra saw at once he had spoken without due consideration.

'In a manner o' speakin', that is,' he hastily amended himself.

'Imphm,' said Clocky.

He was never known by any other name than Clocky. I know not why . . . unless it was that he was ever dignified with that dour and brooding impassivity characteristic of a clocking hen. How he had ever contrived to get married was a mystery; but it was maliciously whispered that Jean Inglis had aided him considerably to the point of asking her.

For many years Clocky had hung in a sheepish way around the little Inglis croft, and made little progress; but one night Jean turned a rosy face to him as he was making his departure, and whispered:

'I'm feared.'

'Feared, Jean? What for should ye be feared?'

'I'm feared ye micht kiss me.'

A puzzled expression came over Clocky's honest face.

'But,' he soothed her, 'the door's wide, and your faither and mither handy by.'

'Tuts!' said Jean, rosier than ever. 'It would be gey easy to bang-to the door, and...and I'm feared.'

Clocky stared a moment, like one silent upon a peak in Darien; then, with the one masterful gesture of an uneventful life, banged-to the door.

'Imphm,' he repeated, as one who might shed much light on the subject if he so desired; and he rocked meditatively on an upended barrel.

'D'ye ken what I think?' queried Farmer McMillan; but he was at once ruled out of order.

'We dinna want any comments or advice frae the Auld Kirk,' said Gavin Leitch succinctly. 'We are sufficiently equipped to mind our own affairs.'

'Oh, very weel, very weel,' said McMillan loftily. It was he who had once incontinently damned Donald Strachan, not without reason. 'Far be it frae me to associate wi' a parcel o' bigoted dissenters. For that's a' ye are. The time's coming when the Auld Kirk'll just swallow ye all up again... an' the sooner, the better.'

'Aye,' said Lang Peter grimly; 'that'll be when the great day o' wrath is at hand, and the heavens rolled together as a scroll; when the beast makes war with the saints, and persecutes them for a season... the beast that comes up frae the sea and revels in blasphemies...'

But McMillan was already on his way. The

souter's familiarity with the darker side of eschatology was widely recognized.

Sneddon of Tighnaheugh took up the argument.

'Have ye read the Draft Overture on Union?' he demanded — 'the document that was gotten up by the ministers theirsels for our enlightenment.'

He lingered on enlightenment with fine contempt.

Souter McAllister solemnly nodded.

'A fair eye-opener!' he offered by way of comment.

'It is interesting to see that the very first article relates to the "provisioning o' the ministry," and the last is "the duty o' members to contribute according to their ability to the support o' the Gospel." In other words, the bawbees are the Alpha and Omega o' the whole sorry business. Did ever ye come across the equal to that? Hireling shepherds are they all.'

Andra McKelvie shifted uneasily to the other foot, and remained silent.

'Nothing further is needed,' said McAllister, 'to show the utter lack o' spirituality in the whole proposition.'

James Inglis was twisting the point of his little gray beard . . . a sure sign that the spirit was working in him. James was treasurer of Ardarroch Free Kirk.

'I'm thinking, for my part,' he said slowly, 'that all it shows is the lack o' a saving sense o' duty in the average kirk-goer.'

‘That’s it,’ said Colin Urquhart. He aye took up the collection of a Sabbath, and sometimes it wrung his soul. ‘It’s black shame it should be needful to emphasize such matters, but it is and all. Imphm! I could name some here. . . .’

He looked searchingly about him, and there were those present who studiously avoided his eye. This was just one of those weird turns that McAllister, a hard customer if ever there was one, had not expected the argument to take.

‘I name no names,’ Inglis continued with impressive solemnity, ‘but, I tell ’ee, I’ve kenned men to drop in the collection plate o’ a Sabbath morn half the price they’d give for a glass o’ beer on Saturday night.’

‘Aye, the fourth of it,’ Colin Urquhart amended him, with a devastating knowledge of the facts.

Colin himself was one who aye put aside a tithe of his increase, however lean the year might be.

‘And they seeking the bread o’ heaven! . . . Aye, aye!’

Inglis meditated profoundly for a moment.

‘Say what ye like about the union, Tighnaheugh; but dinna blame the ministers if they have to remind negligent folk o’ their bounden duty to the Lord. If kirk-goers had the grace to contribute to the support o’ the Gospel and the maintenance o’ the sanctuary, as they pay their baker’s bills . . .’

‘Not that they’re ower spry to do even that,’ interrupted Gavin Leitch the baker, fixing Sneddon with a gloomy eye.

Sneddon took up the point at once.

'That's just it. If ye sell me a tainted loaf, will I pay for it? . . . Not I.'

The ever-smouldering fire blazed up instantly in the baker's soul.

'What's this aboot tainted bread? . . . Who says I ever sold tainted bread?'

Some one, a little quicker in the uptake than Gavin, intervened . . . explained that farmer Sneddon was using a parable . . . had no intention of casting aspersions on the staff of life as purveyed by Gavin, but was alluding to the spiritual sustenance offered by the U.P.s.

'Weel,' he said, 'he better be careful o' his parables, or he can get his bread frae Glasgow. I'll sell him nought.'

Farmer Sneddon again had the floor.

'In deference to Gavin's susceptibilities, let's call it a tainted article . . . aye, that just fits it. If a tainted article be offered me, I say: "No; I dinna want it. I canna use it. I'll keep my bawbees in my pouch." That's the policy. If our resentment is reflected in the plate, I'm thinkin' the Holy Wil-lies'll glower.'

'Imphm,' said Clocky. 'That's so.'

'Will a man rob God?' James Inglis quoted solemnly; but Farmer Sneddon professed not to hear him.

'Were we consulted?' he demanded.

'There have been meetings . . .' ventured Andra McKelvie.

'Aye,' said the souter; 'after the project was all cut and dried. . . . No, no; it was promulgated by the clergy, an' settled by the clergy. I canna away with it. Rank sacerdotalism!'

Peter McAllister had gotten hold of the word 'sacerdotalism,' and he was very proud of it. He had been reading the *Glasgow Herald*. It was full of vehement letters signed: 'A Disgusted U.P.', 'Spes Ultra,' 'A Free Kirk Reformer,' and 'An Ignorant Elder.' The ignorance of some elders in those days was abysmal. Sacerdotalism was frequently mentioned, with distaste.

Pensively, and perhaps symbolically, Peter spat on the green.

'The whole business is a piece of ecclesiastical tyranny, that savors more o' the Middle Ages than the present enlightened century.'

Not bad at all for the souter. And he was not wholly beside the mark.

'But tell me, do ye not elect your ministers as pilots and spiritual leaders?'

This from Gavin Leitch. It was desperately hard to get Gavin's real persuasions. He had a way . . . one of Mirren's characteristics, too . . . of entering into any controversy, and lashing out at both sides indiscriminately. He had a wan look, as though forever powdered with flour, which greatly belied his red blood. No one had ever discovered his political leanings. No one knew, in this matter, whether he was an ardent unionist or a die-hard. He might supply the disaffected one day with daz-

zling arguments they had never thought on, and, the next, inconsistently rend them to tatters. Unstable as water, he might have been the Reuben of the community; but when he finally pledged himself, he was loyal to the backbone.

‘Did Gladstone put the question to the electorate when he wanted Home Rule for Ireland?’

‘He did not,’ came fervently from Colin Urquhart, the sole policeman in the district. Colin was an ardent Tory. ‘And Gladstone was out at the next election.’

The Liberals eyed him fiercely, but their turn was to come.

‘Did Sir Robert Peel ask the opinion o’ all his constituencies, when he proposed to repeal the Corn Laws?’

‘Why should he?’ demanded Colin.

‘Let that flee stick tae the wa’,’ said Farmer Sneddon. ‘A truce to your politics. This is something that goes a sight deeper . . . affecting, as it does, our spiritual welfare.’

‘Aye, does it,’ agreed Lang Peter.

Gavin sneered.

‘Ye canna deny, though, that ye called the Reverend Donald Strachan to your spiritual oversight.’

‘I didna vote for him,’ protested Sneddon. ‘I sore mistrusted at the time we were makin’ a grave mistake.’

‘And I was all for my ain nominee . . .’ Urquhart justified himself, ‘him that preached on: “Will the son o’ Jesse give ye fields and vineyards?”’

'Yon smout!' said Gavin irreverently.

'A bonnie reasoner, I maintain, and sound in his doctrine.'

'Imphm,' said Clocky.

'But ye agreed to make it unanimous,' said Andra McKelvie, 'when the majority was for Maister Strachan.'

Andra was ever the peacemaker. Anything in the way of dissension set him fidgeting uncomfortably.

Farmer Sneddon nodded reluctantly.

'Aye; but it went sore against my better judgment.'

'I mind,' Souter McAllister corroborated him, 'when he was elected, ye turned to me and said: "I fear we'll be left to bury that ane" . . . your very words.'

Gavin Leitch chuckled.

'Was that the night Morag got ye sic a clout on the lug, Tighnaheugh?'

'Have done with your animosity toward Maister Strachan,' said James Inglis sternly. 'He's a wise-like man, and a gifted preacher; and if some o' them afore whom he casts his pearls . . .'

The souter started as if stung.

'James,' he said reproachfully, 'let us not descend frae the high places of argument to mere offensive bickering. Such diatribes are in verra bad taste . . . though I do admit I, for one, am disappointed in Donald Strachan. He's stricken wi' the scourge o' the Higher Criticism; he welcomes union wi' the U.P.s; and . . .'

‘And what are the U.P.s but infidels?’ wailed Miss Turnbull. She had come out of the shop with a basket of what she would have called ‘messages’ on her arm, and had paused to listen. ‘They’ve cast frae them Original Sin. They’ve taken away the damnation of infants. They regard hell as a mere state o’ the mind. What have they left to believe in?’

‘Christians!’ said Sneddon scathingly. He gazed sternly at Andra McKelvie. ‘I’m surprised at ye.’

No doubt about it, there were some in Ardarroch who did not welcome union with the United Presbyterians.

(2)

Donald was by no means a high-handed priest. He did his best to win over his dour little flock to a sane understanding of the great sister Church; but it was too late. The union of the Churches was already assured; and men like Sneddon and McAllister, and women like Miss Turnbull, who had been brought up in the belief that the Free Kirk of Scotland were the chosen people, had not been consulted in the matter.

Church leaders might protest that there was no existent machinery for such consultation, as they did protest with frequency and fervor; the government was representative, not democratic. But it was a tactical blunder, with woeful results. The U.P.s did better. No dread bellowings arose in the

U.P. Kirk; no broils necessitated police interference; no U.P. community was split in twain.

At the meeting held in Ardarroch for enlightenment regarding the union, every one was present. And those who had Donald's interests most at heart were ill at ease. He had spunk, to call such a meeting. Even Sneddon said as much. There was a certain tension in the atmosphere, a fearful looking-for of judgment . . . as though time had travailed in pain of some portentous happening just about to come to birth.

Some were there, as well he knew, not to listen to reason, but grimly to fight against the whole destructive spirit of the age. They took Donald Strachan as the concrete symbol of all from which they shrank. Their leader, Sneddon, had lost a preliminary skirmish, when the minister worsted him by surprise strategy in the matter of Morag's fitness for kirk membership; but he had haunted the victor in the meanwhile like any uneasy spirit, vowing to meet him again at Philippi. The decisive test of Philippi was at hand. The malcontents were ready, and armed to the teeth. You could not but feel the electric sense of impending storm. And not a loyalist there but dreaded what might come to pass. A portentous hour.

Two or three whispered gravely together; the majority sat dumb, and obviously uncomfortable. They were a peace-loving folk at heart. Little Morag McAllister, in particular, was on pins and needles. Well she knew what was toward. She had

heard her father and Tighnaheugh in dark conspiracy, and she was a prey to horrid forebodings.

Donald entered, and every one was still.

‘We shall worship God by singing to His praise in the one hundred and twenty-second Psalm . . . Psalm number one hundred and twenty-two, to the tune “Dunfermline.”’

Not one of the assembled villagers but knew every line of it.

‘Jerus’lem, as a city, is
compactly built together:
Unto that place the tribes go up,
the tribes of God go thither . . .

Pray that Jerusalem may have
peace and felicity:
Let them that love thee and thy peace
have still prosperity.’

‘Have still prosperity,’ Peter recited in monotone, after the old Scots fashion.

‘Have still prosperity,’ sang the people.

And the scent of the roses and honeysuckle drifted in by the open windows, and the drowsy murmur of bees, and a distant whisper of great waters.

Then all the people arose to their feet, and Donald prayed.

He prayed for the peace of the community of the faithful. He prayed for vision, and loyalty, and mutual understanding. He led his little flock into the very Holy of Holies, that there they might discard all personal animosities and little intoler-

ances, and, in the light of the Eternal, review their plans and projects, and see how they actually looked and make decision accordingly.

But people so soon get back to their ordinary profane outlook and atmosphere. Possibly there were some who had been unable to accompany him. Miss Leitch of the bakery was subsequently heard berating a sheepish pillar of the kirk, properly enough, because in the very midst of the prayer he had 'made a trumpet o' his nose.' And Morag McAllister was sure that Sneddon, as he stood with bowed head, was 'having a keek' at a bit paper in his hand. Morag did not dare to enlarge on this. Her own eyes should have been tightly closed.

Donald spoke at some length. He mentioned that he was well aware of the antagonism of certain members of his congregation to the union. He deplored it, of course, but he could not fail to understand it. Only discussion could clear the air; and he welcomed discussion.

He pointed out that on all fundamental matters the Churches were one at heart... 'Question!' hissed Sneddon... yet all over the country their activities overlapped. He outlined the steps that had been taken toward the joining of the Churches, dwelt in detail upon some of the obvious advantages of union, and asked for questions and comments.

Lang Peter McAllister was on his feet in a moment; and little Morag cast down her eyes ashamedly, for she had reason to know her father's per-

suasions. The precentor's box gave the souter a coign of vantage little inferior to the pulpit.

'For more than fifty years we've managed fairly weel without the U.P.s,' he said dourly; 'and what's to hinder us frae managing still? Let them that want union go and have it. Aye, let them just become U.P.s, and be done with it . . . or else build their ain kirks and manses, and leave these here to them that are weel content.'

This brought slight applause, but was considered a shrewd sally.

'We all ken there are many professors and meenisters o' the U.P.s that hold infidel views and indulge in ritualistic practices, and are never brought to book.'

Peter took a deep breath, and proceeded to illustrate his point.

'Callum McNeill was saying, only the other day, that he and his went over to the U.P. Kirk in Ardenchravie to give them a fair try-out; and there was a godless book-mark set in the very pulpit Bible, wi' the letters I.H.S. wrought in the end of it that hung over the book-board, for a' to see.'

Miss Turnbull sighed deeply, in an audible horrified sort of way.

'No sooner had he set eyes on it than he marched right oot to the vestry, and confronted the meenister.

"“Sir,” said he, “I’m a stranger here, but I’m a God-fearin’ man; and, if ye dinna tak’ that Papish

adornment oot o' the Word o' God this meenit, I maun leave this kirk, and a' my family wi' me."

'And he did.'

Approving mutters from Colin Urquhart.

'That settled him, I'll warrant. Good for Cal-lum!'

'And they had a posy o' flowers set up alangside the meenister, forby . . . a secular ornamentation, taking the thoughts o' the worshipers away frae higher things. There are your U.P.s for ye!'

Lang Peter's voice took on a high fanatical whine.

'Come ye oot frae among them, saith the Lord, and trespass not in the accursed thing. Dally not wi' the corrupt and persecutin' Church o' Rome on the one hand, nor wi' the deadly quagmire o' doubt and heresy on the other. No, no; the U.P.s are no fit helpmeets for the Sons o' the Disruption of 1843. Be ye not unequally yoked wi' unbelievers.'

Peter was surpassing himself.

Miss Robertson of Meikle Loan forthwith arose, and unbosomed herself in a single breath.

'Seems to me,' she said — and, for a big warm-hearted couthy body, she was almost snippy — 'all the members o' both denominations worth the hearing approve of the union; and the only dissent comes frae the disgruntled folk we a' ken and have just drilled oorsels to tolerate.'

'Order, Miss Robertson!' said Donald . . . but not very sternly.

'Weel, that's the way I think of it,' concluded the lady, and subsided.

Miss Robertson, douce woman, was vexed in her soul at Sneddon and McAllister. She hesitated to call them fools outright, but, in confidence, regarded them as such as Saint Paul approved the Corinthians for suffering gladly . . . which amounted to the same thing; and she was not slow to dub them donnert bodies . . . a grave affront.

'The great questions o' the soul canna be answered by mere gibes,' said Sneddon of Tighnaheugh reproachfully. 'Will Miss Robertson deny that agnosticism is spreadin' in the land, and the U.P. Kirk is a hot-bed o' free-thinking? Even the elect are contaminated. Aye, it's pitifu', pitifu'! Ye'll not have heard, perhaps, that Dr. Ross Taylor, the Moderator, in the Free Kirk Assembly last month, spoke favorably o' . . . *Charles Darwin?*'

'Ye don't say so, Maister Sneddon?' said Angus Kilpatrick in an awed whisper.

Miss Turnbull fidgeted in her seat.

'Hear that now! Was ever the like?'

Sneddon was greatly encouraged by the stir he had created.

'Aye, the defenses are weakened frae within, and the enemy may now come in like a flood if we dinna watch oorsels. Christianity has been grievously wounded in the house of its friends. Evolution, they call it! Blasphemy'd be a better word . . . rank blasphemy. Man, they say, was never made in the image o' God, but sprang o' gibberin' apes

and puggies! It's fair calamitous. Was not the wisdom o' the wise confounded by the earth, and the sea, and a' that therein is, being formed out o' chaos in the space o' six days . . . Genesis first? And Ross Taylor, one of our own number, but, significantly enough, an advocate o' this unholy union, avers it may have taken hundreds of years. Aye, but many in Israel will mourn over this surrender o' one of the bulwarks o' Zion.'

Donald Strachan offered a little clearer light on the matter of evolution; and Sneddon listened with a fine horror.

'There!' he said. 'Ye can see for yoursels. Noo, what'll happen to our cherished faith, if we join the U.P.s, the source and fountain-head o' all this infidelity? Tell me that.'

He paused dramatically, but no one seemed in a position to answer him.

'And if this, the very first o' the miracles related in the Word, be doubted, what about the rest? That's the question. Where is it a' going to end? What about the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection? Destroy the foundations, and the whole fabric topples.'

'There's naught the matter wi' the foundations,' said Willie Bannerman, the pier-master. 'The matter is wi' them that canna read poetry as poetry, and are a stumblin'-block to thinking men. Ye micht as weel say, if Tam o' Shanter didna actually set eye on witches and warlocks and Auld Nick himsel, then there's no truth in Rabbie Burns.'

Tuts, man! ye're daft. Ye're no fit to be trusted wi' Genesis first.'

The congregation turned to stare on him. Willie was ever greatly daring.

'Take Noah's Ark, again. I'll ask o' Farmer Sneddon, who kens beasties: is it thinkable that in a steadin' the size o' Noah's Ark, if he has ever worked out the given dimensions, he could stable seven o' every clean animal . . .'

'Two,' interrupted Miss Turnbull mechanically.

'Seven,' persisted Willie ' . . . Genesis seven and second . . . elephants, and lions, and tigers, and camels, and cattle, and rhinoceroses, and all, with birds and insects, and two of every unclean animal forby, pigs, and conies, and . . . and . . .'

For the life of him, Willie could not think up another unclean animal. With his eyes he implored the minister for help.

'All the animals you mentioned, Willie, except cattle,' said Donald gently, 'were regarded as unclean; but never mind.'

Willie never minded in the least.

'Well, anyhow, it doesn't affect the argument. And there was all the fodder for them for a hundred and fifty days. . . . And only one small window to the craft. Where could they get air to breathe? It's fair destruction to our present-day intelligences, to read that as literal prose.'

Willie was in fine fettle.

'Noah was never meant to be a man,' he summed it up. 'He was a solemn and instructive parable.

And I maintain it does not affect the foundations of our faith one iota to say so.'

'That's the way it goes,' shouted Sneddon, springing to his feet. 'Hark to him! And the meenister o' the kirk just sits there and lets him talk, without one word o' reproof or admoneetion!'

'Wheesht, man!' said Miss Robertson.

'I'll no wheesht . . . Maister Strachan, will ye tell us: do you, or do you not, believe the Word o' God?'

'I do,' said Donald steadily. 'I believe the Word of God, as it is contained in the Scriptures and interpreted by the Divine Spirit. But if you mean: do I accept everything in Hebrew literature as literal fact, I do not. I agree with Willie Bannerman. I read poetry as poetry, and drama as drama . . .'

'Drama!' gasped Lang Peter McAllister, to whom the theater was ever a festering pit of corruption.

'Aye; and parable as parable.'

'Jesuitical wriggings, and sheer infidelity!' commented Sneddon of Tighnaheugh.

Morag, in her pew, clenched and unclenched her strong young hands in helpless frenzy. She had read of Jenny Geddes, of course, in the school history-book, and how she did mayhem with a footstool on the person of a bishop, no less, in the very Church of Saint Giles in Edinburgh, and no one seemed to regard it as a deadly sin. For a few moments Sneddon was in dire peril. But Morag, alas!

had no stool . . . such luxuries were discouraged in kirk at Ardarroch . . . nothing but a Bible; and she dared not throw a Bible at Tighnaheugh. Jenny Geddes would never have hesitated, but Morag was not sufficiently emancipated. She was suffering grievously in her soul.

Donald was speaking again, apparently little perturbed over his detractors.

‘But I fear we are getting far from the purpose of this meeting. Whatever your attitude to the Higher Criticism may be, you cannot hold our brethren of the U.P. Kirk responsible for it.’

‘Aye; but that’s just what I do,’ persisted Sneddon. ‘And, moreover, I will thank ye no to call the U.P.s brethren o’ ours. I deny the relationship. Brethren! It’s their Declaratory Act gave countenance to any heresy. It’s they that have contaminated oor ain folk. And we’re getting at the facts at last. That’s something.’

The farmer was flushed and triumphant. His followers cheered him on. The hounds were in full cry. Things were happening.

‘I’ve heard tell that blasphemous folk have called in question the Doctrine o’ the Virgin Birth,’ Sneddon went on. ‘I’ve heard ye say that the disciples knew naught of it . . . Imphm! . . . and that belief in it is not essential for joining the kirk . . . Imphm! Haply ye disbelieve in it yoursel. Will ye give us your views, Maister Strachan; for we are minded to ken.’

Donald sighed.

‘My friends,’ he said, ‘this does not seem to me the occasion to discuss at length the dogmas of our Creed.’ . . .

‘Never was a better,’ said Sneddon grimly.

‘But, as you are well aware, I am always ready to tell you from this pulpit . . . aye, or outside o’ the pulpit, for that matter of it . . . what I believe in my heart. I do not disbelieve in the Virgin Birth. But, lest Mr. Sneddon may get wrong notions from this remark, I shall say definitely that I do not consider it a matter of first importance whether one believes it or not.’

This was terrible. In the session, Donald had maintained that the first disciples had known nothing of the doctrine when they were called from their nets; but then they were poor ignorant men, with much to learn. Donald had enjoyed advantages that they had never enjoyed, and opportunities aye bring responsibilities. No disciple could ever have been called to the charge of the Free Kirk of Ardarroch until he had learned all that was set forth in the Creed. For the moment, Ardarroch was aghast . . . thunder-struck.

‘We’re all but children crying in the night,’ Donald was saying. ‘Wherefore should we deal in cold reason wi’ our cherished beliefs? If ye insist on my mental reactions to many of the tales I learned at my mother’s knee, I’m bound to admit they are not all convincing . . . yet I’d be sweir to let them go.’

Sneddon was again on his feet, hands clenched

and face aflame; but Donald very quietly motioned him down.

‘Hearken unto me,’ he said, ‘and I shall unburden myself.’

For a moment he paused, and the very silence seemed to shriek . . . an overburdened, pregnant silence. The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth not a matter of first importance! Why! no one could ever have imagined a minister speaking in that way. Peter McAllister’s face was white, and his jaw was set. Miss Robertson was, all unawares, pulling the fringe off her Paisley shawl that her mother had been married in, and her grandmother. Forgotten was the union of the Kirks; forgotten was time and place and everything, save this grave quiet soul who seemed to dangle as by a hair over the precipice.

Morag scarce dared to breathe.

‘Noo he’s done for himsel!’ she thought woe-fully in her heart.

She could see him dragged from the pulpit, driven out of the parish, flung to the beasts.

And before Donald’s own eyes there arose a forbidding vision of a kirk divided against itself, and a breach that could never be healed. It was dreadful. But he must speak, as of sincerity, whatever the result might be. An issue had been raised that no individual nor church could ever be strong enough to overcome. The future belonged to the things for which he stood. Sooner or later, even the most conservative of the Free Kirk must accept

them, take them for granted, wonder that they had ever failed to see the truth of them.

Yet, in a very real way, he did accept this doctrine in question.

‘On the one hand,’ he said, ‘it does very little good to denounce as an infidel the man that just canna believe the Nativity story as it stands. A man can but believe that which is borne in upon his soul. And wherefore should there be such an uproar, if this particular fragment o’ Holy Writ be questioned? Have ye never heard that whole books about Jesus have been discarded . . . books that were once in the Bible, accepted by the Church, read and revered by believers? Aye, they have been flung aside; and still Christianity endures.’

‘Will ye name for us the books?’ demanded Sneddon. He had assumed the air of a judge, with power of life and death, but with intent to give the prisoner at the bar every possible chance.

Donald was a mighty storehouse of hard facts.

‘Among others,’ he said readily, ‘the Gospel according to Thomas, the Itineraries of Peter and Paul, the Epistles of Hermas and Polycarp. Remember, none o’ the evangelists had ever heard tell o’ the Master till He was a grown man. Anything they wrote of His birth or childhood must have been mere hearsay. Jesus Himself, so far as is known, never made mention of it. Stories were told lang syne of the childhood of Jesus, that even Tighnaheugh would be loath to accept, as, for instance, that He made clay sparrows, and clappit

His hands, and they took wing. What was to be expected? Never a human being overtopped his fellows but queer little tales would crop up about his childhood.'

'That's enough, sir. Sneddon arose, as though in spirit he were donning the black cap, to pronounce the death-sentence. 'We are to understand then . . .'

'Bide a wee, man,' continued the imperturbable cleric, and strong and willing hands seized his antagonist from the rear, and reseated him.

Donald again gazed for a few moments through the open windows at the waters that danced and shimmered under the stooping sun. The tension was frightful. Destiny hung in the balance.

'It's an interesting question,' he went on, just as if he were discussing a matter of no more than ordinary secular interest, 'why we have come to put so much stress on the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Why in the world should earnest folk contend, for instance, that our Lord's sinlessness required a breach with ordinary generation? As a matter of fact, a taint that can be communicated through a human father maun be communicated just as readily through a human mother. . . . Or, again, that our Lord's Divinity required it? There is no such great abyss, as that suggests, between God and humanity. I've harped on that often enough, I'm thinking. The Almighty is our Father. Love, truth, righteousness, all are divine qualities. Grant a man, a true man, utterly possessed of

these, and you have God in human mould. It is not in a superhuman birth, accompanied by new star and angel song, nor in a superhuman death, that shook the earth and darkened the sun, but in the simple and wonderful life and personality of the Nazarene, God revealed Himself. Cling to that, though all else should fail you.'

'In short'... the awful tones of Sneddon... 'ye do not believe in the Virgin Birth.'

'Bide a wee, man... bide a wee. I have only asserted that my intellect does not find it wholly convincing, and that my faith would not be overthrown if, by any means, the story could be proved false. But there's a something in me that clings to the old Nativity story, and who can tell whether that something be not greater than my intellect? God operates through natural law, as a rule. But I have always been reluctant to make a categorical assertion of what God will, or will not, do. That's a blasphemous kind o' presumption. And, if I want to believe in the Virgin Birth, I have excellent grounds for such belief.'

Sneddon muttered incoherently, but was understood to be saying that he was glad to hear it.

'Ye see, Jesus of Nazareth happened in history only once. There never was any one like Him. And when you come across a unique personality, it seems natural to expect certain unique circumstances and events to attach thereto. He Himself is a miracle. His whole life is a miracle; and no prosaic fact in history or life is more convincing to

me than this age-long miracle of Jesus of Nazareth. Why then should I disbelieve in His miraculous birth?’

Morag heaved a great sigh of relief. Never in her young life had she followed a theological argument as she had followed this one. Sneddon seemed almost disappointed. The whole tension was relaxed. Donald had ably carried his loyal adherents along with him; yet, if he had expressed actual disbelief in this matter, there is no saying what might have happened. . . . Alienation of the best of them, assuredly. . . . Impeachment before the Synod. . . . Perhaps, the unfrocking of him. Who could tell?

‘And that’s all I have to say of it. If ye canna believe honestly in the story of the Nativity, I shall not seek to persuade you, but shall bid you God-speed. And, if it comes up around your heart, as it comes up around mine, ye may be sure I shall take no measure to shake your faith, but rather take the more comfort in mine own . . . and bid you God-speed.

‘*Now, Mr. Sneddon . . .*’

But Sneddon felt that the matter was hopeless. He had been trifled with . . . coaxed to solemn expectancy and then balked of his prey. Donald, in his conclusion, had spoken in utter orthodoxy. It was the whole atmosphere he breathed that was heretical. And one cannot joust an atmosphere. The difficulty with Strachan was, that he was profoundly orthodox himself in most matters . . . certainly in all essential matters; but he had a way of

seeing and appreciating and sympathizing with the most heretical views of others which goaded the literalist to distraction.

Sneddon slowly rose to his feet.

‘Weel,’ he said, ‘I’ve just this to say. I’m a believer in the “stop the supplies” policy. If the meenisters o’ the Kirk insist on this union, which is ungodly and obnoxious to all right-thinkin’ bodies, stop the supplies. If Maister Strachan believes in it, let there be no further contribution to his support in this kirk. I think it’s high time the people should see to it they are not driven like a wheen sheep by them that eat o’ their bread and look to them for the upkeep o’ the meenistry. How did we come to lose our American Colonies? Answer me that. Aye, and is not the present bloody and costly war wi’ the Boers in South Africa the result o’ taxation without representation?’

So the discussion went on, as it was going on in a multitude of Highland kirks; and, as usual, it was the malcontents who had everything to say, and the larger body of staunch loyalists sat stolidly, drinking it all in, and triumphing by sheer inertia.

(3)

It was after this meeting that Donald delivered a master-stroke . . . entirely illegal, but surprisingly effective.

‘Mr. Sneddon,’ he said to the farmer of Tighnaheugh, ‘you have been a thorn in my flesh since ever I came to Ardarroch; and you have seized

every opportunity to oppose me in my work, and to harass me in my daily life. If this were a heathen land, and there were no other kirk, wherein ye might hear the exposition o' the Word of God and partake o' the Sacraments, I'd willingly bear with you, for it is borne in upon my heart ye have sore need. But there's an Established Kirk in this very village, and a U.P. kirk in Ardenchravie . . .'

Sneddon contrived to express by a mere gesture the ultimate revulsion; but Donald just went right on.

'And Free Kirks over to Greenloaning and Craighenness and the Neuk, and I'm thinking ye'll worship God better in another sphere . . . a more congenial sphere. Here is your disjunction certificate, all properly filled in and signed.'

And Sneddon, before ever he had taken time to give due consideration to so momentous a matter, found the certificate in his hand, and had ceased to be a member of the Free Kirk of Ardarroch.

CHAPTER XII

THE WEE FREES

IN spite of all protest, the union took place.

On October 31, 1900, at a great Assembly in the Waverley Market, Edinburgh, the two Scottish Churches were lawfully joined together. And, with a magnificent gesture of protest, the conservatives of the Free Kirk, henceforth to be known . . . not in any spirit of levity, but simply for identification purposes . . . as the Wee Frees, held Assembly in Queen Street Hall, and solemnly struck some eight hundred renegade ministers from the rolls, leaving seven only to carry on the traditions and uphold the standard of the Free Church of Scotland.

It reminded one rather of the ancient anecdote of a proud mother, who watched the regiment pass in review, and murmured:

‘Mercy me! They’re all oot o’ step but oor Jock.’

They called themselves the Free Church of Scotland, the irreconcilable seven, and confidently laid claim to all the funds, endowments, and property of that body: eight hundred churches and mansees, three colleges, the Assembly Hall, mission stations, everything. It was a gorgeous claim . . . a dashing, sumptuous, dramatic claim. It pleased Scotland tremendously. It appealed to the Scottish sense of humor, which has always had a gruesome

strain in it anyhow. People laughed hoarsely, mulled it over at leisure, and laughed again. There was a fine full flavor to the joke. They thought the Wee Frees were just playing at being the Free Kirk, as bairns will play at soldiers. They little knew.

‘Aye,’ said Sneddon grimly; ‘they’ll be laughing the other side o’ the mouth afore we’re feenished with them.’

And Sneddon, for once, was perfectly right.

Naturally, the Wee Frees did not lack for adherents. Throughout the Highlands were many, like Lang Peter McAllister and Farmer Sneddon, who reveled in dissent. They were camsterie folk at the best. A sort of sect-hatred possessed them. Inherently, they were schismatics. Nearly every kirk had some small disgruntled minority; and, when opportunity arose, the remnant of the Free Kirk became a sort of Cave of Adullam for all the malcontents and disaffected throughout the country.

But they had courage. Leaders of a forlorn hope, and champions of an unpopular cause, they were reviled as dullards, bigots, and disturbers of the peace. Unflinching they held their ground.

Their stupendous claim against the United Church was dismissed without delay by the Scottish courts. No matter. They had anticipated as much. They appealed it to the House of Lords.

But, in some Highland parts, where factions were fairly evenly divided, feeling ran high. The

processes of law were all too slow for some of the hotheads. The Wee Frees were not inclined to abandon their kirks without a struggle. And there were wars and rumors of wars . . . wrath and terror on the march in many parts of Scotland . . . Communion celebrated under police protection . . . epidemics of window-smashing and burning of hayricks . . . gunboats in the offing . . . queer happenings in the name of God.

In Ardarroch, where the majority still clung to Donald Strachan, that grim sectary, Sneddon of Tighnaheugh, who had been long suspect of an overweening ambition to mount to the very pulpit, held forth to a small group of the faithful in his own big barn.

Little Morag, under stern parental guidance, was of that group; but she took no joy in it. The Sabbaths, to which she had grown accustomed to look forward, were become again days of wrath, days of unremitting irk and fret. For the Wee Frees, the cynosure of every eye, must needs walk circumspectly, and preserve the straitest traditions of the Disruption.

They began by drawing down the window-shades of a Sabbath morning.

Donald, of course, was duly reprobated in the barn. He heard of it without surprise. He well knew he was regarded as a false teacher and a hireling shepherd; and the prophets of Israel had been lavish in their diatribes against the degenerate spiritual leaders of their day. Not one of these but

Sneddon could use to advantage. He knew his Bible.

‘Perished are my people for lack of knowledge. For they are but as their priestlings, who have turned their glory into shame. They feed on the sins of my people, and to the guilt of these lift up their appetite. Hear this, O priest, for on you is the sentence.’

Pungent words, these, and as good as new, in a day when the spiritual leaders of the Free Kirk had betrayed their trust.

‘Aye; hear this, O priest.’

‘They’re gone clean daft,’ commented Miss Robertson. ‘Dinna you be feared to answer them frae the pulpit, Maister Strachan . . . the ignorant, donnert bodies!’

But Donald had other uses for his pulpit.

It was Sneddon himself who alienated the Leitches of the bakery.

Gavin, of course, was no friend of Tighnaheugh. Miss Mirren, too, was a queer dour person at the best; and the mere fact that every one expected her to throw in her lot with the Wee Frees might have been sufficient inducement to her to cling to the United Church, even if Farmer Sneddon had refrained from interference; but Sneddon interfered, and that settled it.

Miss Leitch and her brother had a baking monopoly in the district, and one had to deal with them very tactfully, or they would simply refuse to supply bread and breakfast rolls. Time and again

had Gavin galloped his baker's van, hell-for-leather, past some little cottage, entirely indifferent to the would-be purchaser, who stood at the door awaiting him, tray in hand; and she was left breadless and dismayed, till, in some humility, she had put things right, whatever they were. Disturbing folk, with a queer insight into other people's motives and all manner of familiar and intimate things, and untroubled with respect of persons. It was distinctly tactless, even foolhardy, of Sneddon, to attempt to force the issue.

Mirren Leitch was a robust soul, who never heard of sickness without mentioning the fact that no doctor had ever set foot ben her house, nor had she ever known a day's sickness in her life. But the day dawned at last when even Mirren Leitch was stricken, and must needs summon a physician, and give heed to his instructions to lie still for a few days.

'No, she's not in her usual,' said Gavin to inquirers who missed her from her accustomed place. 'She's gey sickly, but more worrit that she should be sick at all than by whatever it is itself. Imphm! She's little gimp in her the now, and no stomach for the mercies.'

A sympathetic summer visitor groped around for some way to express her sympathy.... Black grapes?...

'Mercy on us!' Gavin flung up his hands in horror. 'No that, whatever!... Black grapes are aye a sure sign o' the end!'

No sooner had Farmer Sneddon heard of the

matter than he hastened to anticipate Donald Strachan, and, as self-appointed pastor of the Wee Frees, to seize the first opportunity that had presented itself of visiting the sick. The Leitches had not yet declared themselves, and, in any case, he had long been an elder in the Free Kirk. They could not very well show him the door.

Miss Leitch, who was already convinced that the doctor had made a mountain out of a molehill, could not, for the life of her, see any reason for this new infliction. Donald's cheery smile might have been welcomed; but Farmer Sneddon...! If Mirren had any actual leaning toward the Wee Frees, Sneddon of Tighnaheugh was just about the last man she would have chosen to sit under.

'Tuts!' she said. 'I'm no *that* bad.'

Sneddon shook his head gravely...no mere negative, but an expression of doubt, backed by the instant production of a pocket Bible and preliminary clearing of his throat.

Miss Leitch felt worse already; and, not without reason, perhaps, blamed her visitor. The mere sight of him, with his head-shakings and throat-clearings, was an offense. But she had been brought up in the traditions of pastoral visitation, and, though her passion was just on the boil, she was able still to maintain an appearance of civility. With infinite patience she listened to the psalm just naturally chosen by Sneddon. The last time Mirren Leitch had heard it had been at the funeral of old Granny Laird.

‘Let us read together frae the Word o’ God, as it is contained in the ninetieth psalm.’

With what unction he rolled the familiar words under his tongue . . . lovely words . . . sacred words; but hideous to this unaccustomed sufferer. In memory, she was up to Laird’s again; and the shades were drawn. She shifted uneasily. Farmer Sneddon, sitting by the bedside in his Sunday blacks, became somehow ghoulish in her eyes, a bird of ill-omen, a vulture, malignly anticipating unspeakable things.

‘Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep. In the morning they are like grass that groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth.’

Sneddon, in his own somber fashion, must have been enjoying himself hugely. This was the sort of thing he had dreamed about.

But it was only with a supreme effort that, for the moment, Miss Leitch repressed comments which would undoubtedly have been whispered in awe beyond Ardencravie before nightfall. She was rapidly giving way before a queer combination of terror and wrath.

‘Amen!’ said Sneddon. ‘And may God bless to us the reading of His Word. Let us join together in prayer.’

He got down on his knees by the bedside, and began. And a dreadful thing happened.

To this day, Miss Leitch could not tell you just

how it happened, though it is doubtful if you would ever have the temerity to question her about it. Only Tighnaheugh knew, and he could scarcely be said to have witnessed it. Doubtless, for the moment, Miss Leitch had gone stark crazy under the sense of a steady irrevocable thrust toward the tomb. She might almost have pleaded self-defense.

Farmer Sneddon had just groaned forth the words:

‘And if it pleaseth Thee to tak’ oor dear sister . . .’

A naked foot stole from under the bedclothes, planted itself swiftly and firmly on his chest; and suddenly he went heels over head, and brought up with the lowest knob of the chest of drawers in the small of his back.

‘W-w-woman!’ he stuttered.

And: ‘That’ll learn ye!’ gasped Mirren Leitch, and drew the bedclothes over her crimsoned countenance.

It was awful. Nothing like it had ever happened in Ardarroch in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. It was not mere irreverence and impropriety; it was shocking, malignant, devastating sacrilege . . . something entirely beyond reprehension and rebuke. Sneddon knew in the soul of him he simply did not have the words adequate to meet the situation. He strode forth from the house, only pausing a moment ceremonially at the door to shake the very dust from off his feet.

‘The long haverin’ gomeril!’ Miss Leitch would say thereafter, whenever she set eyes on him.

And she was grappled indissolubly to the United Kirk . . . a doughty adherent, at that, as she was yet to prove.

But the Wee Frees prospered in Ardarroch.

They were a Highland people, brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Shorter Catechism, and they feared change worse than death. Over a third of Donald’s flock went over to the conventicle . . . some, alas! from personal animosity, but most of them from blind devotion to ancient institutions. They did not realize how they insulted God by shutting their minds to His ever-growing revelation. Dour, grim folk, very jealous for their faith.

But they went peaceably.

Miss Mirren Leitch was plainly restive under the comparative peace that obtained in Ardarroch.

‘Imphm!’ she said grimly. ‘I’d just like to see Lang Peter and Tighnaheugh try something on.’

Donald Strachan shook his head over the whole sorry business.

‘Beware o’ self-righteousness and spiritual pride,’ he gave warning: ‘a thing the Lord hates, yea, is an abomination unto Him! We canna accept their view of God; but neither can they accept ours. They may be intolerant; but so may we. See to it that there be no violence. The earnest people that kindled the fires o’ the Inquisition thought they were doing honor to God. The very light that was in them was darkness. Yet, mind you, Torque-

mada himself would willingly have gone to the stake for his own convictions . . .’

A whimsical smile crossed his features, as his eyes roved over the more militant of his followers.

‘And I’m thinkin’,’ he added, ‘if the heretics had been given the chance, he’d have had to go. Aye, aye; we’re all very feeble, intolerant, persecutin’ creatures. God be merciful unto our imperfections.’

‘All the same . . .’ said Mirren.

She was entirely unconvinced.

CHAPTER XIII

HAVOC

MORAG was eighteen years of age, and eighteen years of age is regarded in Ardarroch as mature womanhood; but, of course, it is womanhood strangely shot with the glammers and fears and idolatries of childhood.

Her nature demanded of her action, adventure, freedom, excitement. Lang Peter countered with a demand for douce restraint, discipline, implicit obedience. He had no need of worldly pleasures himself, and never would he permit such vanities to child of his. Ye canna serve God and mammon. And the guardianship of a human soul, an immortal soul, of which he could in no wise shelve responsibility, was a serious matter to him, and a constant carking care. But Peter was satisfied he had the upper hand. By sheer brute strength he had overawed her, and held her in leash.

These abominable old adages: 'Bairns should see, but not touch,' and 'Bairns should be seen, but not heard,' were Gospel to Peter . . . derived, indeed, from the infallible wisdom of the East, and supplemented by a lofty contempt of women from the same source. Peter read his Bible laboriously and conscientiously, but not very intelligently. It never occurred to him that a bairn might some-

times be well worth the hearing, and rather helpful in her touch.

How Morag had yearned for life, more life and fuller, in the depths of her heart . . . life, as opposed to mere existence!

Under her father's able hands she might well have been moulded to a mere country drudge of lack-luster eyes, dwarfed in spirit and broken in hope, to mate resignedly with some untutored rustic, and bear him children, and pass on to them the craven fear of God. But one man had touched her eyes, and the luster lived. They were wide to the beckoning loveliness of life. They saw things undreamed of by Peter McAllister. She was in fierce rebellion against her stern Mosaic upbringing, her father's faith, her father himself.

All unawares to that grim pillar of the ancient dispensation, Morag was the incarnate spirit of the bewildering new age and new belief . . . new to Peter at least, and, by such as he, feared worse than loathly disease. All that the Wee Frees had to suffer in their souls by reason of modernism and heresy must needs be visited on Peter, in respect of Morag.

'Honor thy father . . . that thy days may be long upon the land.'

'Aye; but he should treat a body so she can honor him.'

Morag was not even sure that she wanted her days to be long upon the land under the conditions he imposed. She challenged the validity of her

father's precepts, just as the moderns challenged the Hebrew philosophy of life. She shrank from the souter's heavy-handed, grim, and fearsome fatherhood, just as the heretics shrank from the wrathful, vengeful, jealous God he worshiped. And neither was likely to change. There could be no reconciliation. Morag herself could hardly go unscathed, and Peter was bound to be outraged in his soul. Here was the Scottish Crisis in miniature.

From her father, Morag had undoubtedly inherited, along with her love of song, an essential non-conformity to anything that failed to convince her, and a queer strain of dour determination which was like to lead her sooner or later in her own ways, whatever the war of elements, the wrecks of matter, and the crush of worlds. But all else about her, her comely body, her lively but little-used sense of humor, and, above all, her loyal and impulsive young heart, she must have owed to her mother. And her mother was gone. Morag was about as much at home in Ballymenach as a bird in a cage. She had a certain outlook, but she was sore thwarted.

Donald Strachan little realized just how Morag regarded him. Had he realized it, possibly the heavens would have opened; but his eyes were held. To him she was still the distraught little tearful waif he had found dabbling her nettle-stung feet in the burn, however she might have put forth groping little tendrils that twined themselves all unawares about his heart. He tried to give her some-

thing of good cheer; and out of the drab gray canopy over her head the morning stars were set a-singing together.

‘Havers!’ he would have said at the time. ‘I’m old enough to be her father.’

Which, of course, would have been literally untrue, and, in any case, entirely beside the point. Donald was still on the bright side of thirty. Ten years is an amazing abyss to a child of twelve, but not wholly unbridgable at eighteen.

And under his tutelage life had opened out for Morag, unexpectedly and delightfully. It brought her books and a garden . . . educative things. She was suffered to serve her knight in many ways, and such service is more gladsome than rich gifts at his hand. Time and again they wandered Honey-suckle Lane together, or explored the Fairy Dell, or climbed the Tor, learning, incidentally, to identify the wild flowers and the native ferns and the birds, till it was hard to stick Morag on any one of them. On one great occasion, an excursion to a dark and lonely tarn back of Ben Ruadh, commonly reputed an enchanted place. They found enchantment. Simple pleasures, these; but they transfigured life for a young maid.

Donald himself always had a vision of freedom . . . freedom of opinion, spirit, worship . . . any kind of spaciousness. That was why he loved the sea, and the moorland, and lifted up his eyes unto the hills. Morag was a kindred spirit. She never failed him. And he, for his part, never let her for-

get she was his first friend in Ardarroch, nor ever gave her occasion to doubt that she remained his best friend. They were good pals.

And they would go out upon the Loch in the long twilight in Donald's crazy boat, fishing for whiting and flounders till the dogfish began to intrude. Then it was no use.

Perhaps, if they moved to another part of the Loch . . .

'Yonder's a boat that's catching something,' Morag would say.

And they would watch a moment, and see a great fish hauled over the thwart; and they would see the fisherman wrathfully wield a footbrace.

Thump! . . . thump! . . . across the still waters, and language that argued entire ignorance that the minister was within hearing.

'There! Tak' that, ye etceteraed something-or-other!'

Dogfish!

And they would have a laugh, and lapse into song; and other fisher-folk would drift up by, and join in. Morag sang like a mavis. And the stars would come up, and the moon, before the sing-song ended.

She laughed a good deal those days, for one brought up after the straitest sect of her religion, a Free Kirker. If one could only put into words the sheer delight of Morag's laughter! Some thought it not altogether decorous to laugh. They never really laughed at all. Regarding, as they did,

their souls, and the constant peril in which they stood, it was hard to see why they should. Peter was one of these. A wintry smile sometimes stole across his features. Then he was really moved. It was the best he could do. But Morag was at last making use of her gift of laughter, and all a world was winsome.

Then came the disruption of the kirk, and ended the whole thing.

Alack-a-day, that the sunlight should be blotted out, grotesquely enough, by the dead hand of John Calvin, or the moribund head of Farmer Sneddon, or what not! Whatever it was, it had nothing to do with little Morag; but hers was the blackness of darkness that ensued.

Desperately she rebelled against it. But what could she do? Peter could not have her any longer associate with one so diametrically opposed to him in his convictions as the minister was. It would inevitably imperil her eternal welfare. Perhaps, subconsciously, he took a certain satisfaction in getting even with the minister for divers crushing blows sustained in high argument. And the discipline was wholesome for Morag. All things worked together for good.

Peter, going over to the conventicle, ceased automatically to have an oversight of the manse garden, and he saw to it that the labors of his deputy ended then and there. Hector Pitcaithly was appointed precentor and beadle in the souter's stead; and in his spare moments he wrestled

valiantly with the weeds in the garden. But Hector had little aptitude for horticulture, and rather less for cheery comradeship. A sorry substitute for the souter's lass. Morag suffered; the garden suffered; Donald suffered. There seemed a somewhat lacking even in the Sabbath sermons.

At first, Donald strove to retain the little maid's friendship, as though nothing had happened. Why in the world, he demanded, should the kirk schism divide them? He was friendly even with members of the Auld Kirk. Ah! but the gulf between the Auld Kirk and the dissenters was a mere scratch compared with that which yawned between the Wee Frees and the Unionists. It stood to reason that his efforts were foredoomed to failure.

There was no further happy association among the roses. Morag was not suffered to enter the kirk. What was a man to do? Clandestine meetings savored more of love-making than of open healthy comradeship, and, in any case, were like to bring down on Morag's head the souter's wrath.

After one expedition, Lang Peter locked Morag up for three days, and passed in bread and water, like any other conscientious and self-respecting jailer. Donald, getting wind of it, called to reason with him, and had the door slammed in his face. It was absurd . . . preposterous!

He took the first opportunity to accost Peter in the open, and the souter laid bare his heart.

'Once and for all, sir, I'll have ye keep away

frae Morag. I ken fine ye mean her no harm' . . . very handsome, indeed, of Peter McAllister . . . 'but you've wrocht harm enough in Ardarroch. I'm responsible for her soul; and she shall imbibe no more heresy frae you.'

'But, man alive, don't you ever think of her happiness at all?' demanded Donald, with some impatience. 'What have you ever done for her save crush her spirit with the sort of religion you thrust on her?'

It was not perhaps the most conciliatory speech; but it was the way Donald felt about it.

'You leave her happiness to me,' said the souter, with sanctimonious obstinacy. 'It's her happiness in the hereafter I have to think on.'

'But, see here . . .'

'Morag's my own, to do with as it pleases me. Shall I trust her to one, who is no shepherd o' the sheep, but an hireling? No, no; go your ways, and leave me and mine.'

By every law and tradition in Scotland, Peter was entirely within his rights.

Then again people were beginning to talk.

Morag was a level-headed little woman, and she knew her village . . . knew its malice and its petty spite. To those who clung to the kirk she was a pariah. If the minister sought to retain his friendship with a Wee Free maid, when, by all the laws of the village, he should spurn her from his path, there was no end to the lies and scandal that might be invented and accepted.

'Aye, there maun be more to it than meets the eye. Imphm!'

That sort of thing!

A village, fevered with religious dissension, is distorted in its vision and desperately cruel. It was not to be thought on. It would ruin Donald's career . . . destroy his usefulness. Already, even, she was the butt of Ardarroch gossip. She had reason to be aware of that.

So, for very love's sake, she fettered her wayward feelings, stunned them to silence, immured them in some obscure dungeon recess of her being, and left them to live or to die as they might, little dreaming how easily at the first thought of him the prisoners would burst their bonds.

Life closed down on her again like the night. She was hurt . . . and Donald was hurt. A plague o' both the houses.

'Don't you think,' he said to Morag on a chance meeting on the road, when she would fain have avoided him, but he stood foursquare in her path, 'your father will see reason as time goes on? It's all absurd!'

Morag shook her head.

'I'm going to try him out again.'

'No, no; he wouldna listen. . . . And I shouldna be listening to ye now. Think o' your congregation. They'll talk. Aye; they'll stir the session, and take it to the Presbytery. I ken them fine. They're talking already.'

'Let them talk.' Donald was perfectly conscious

of disapproving eyes that peered on him through window-curtains. 'The garden's going to rack and ruin without you . . .'

'Aye; Hector does his best, but he just hasna the way wi' him.'

'And I miss you terribly, Morag.'

Morag lifted swift bright eyes to his a moment, and cast them down again. And she blushed. She knew that blush would be noted . . . not by Donald, particularly, but . . .

'I maun go my ways, Maister Strachan. Your congregation will . . .'

'Oh, blow my congregation!' he said in some heat. She looked on him in amazement.

'Why!'

Donald laughed a little bitterly.

'I'm not a child, Morag. I shall do, for my part, precisely as seems best to me; and my congregation may like it or not, as they please. The whole question is what is best for you.'

The whole question, as it weighed heavily on the heart of Morag, was entirely different; but she let it pass. She could almost feel the gaze of the smith's wife scorching her. Out of the tail of her eye she saw Mirren Leitch hurry into Red McAllister's, and she had a shrewd surmise it was not to purchase vegetables. Summer visitors purchased vegetables. Mirren grew her own.

'We've been pals for over five years now, little Morag,' Donald went on. 'It's grotesque we should be separated just because your father and

I happen to differ in our attitude to another big christian sect.'

'Aye; it's pitifu'.'

'Yet, of course, you do owe him obedience, and ... Heigh-ho, what a mess!'

Morag smiled.

'He may take to walloping me again as he used to do.'

The minister turned red with wrath at the very suggestion.

'I'd just like to hear of him attempting anything of the sort. He'd have me to reckon with. I'd ... But, bless my soul, Morag! he's your father. I whiles forget.'

'I whiles forget, mysel,' said Morag ruefully.

'There must be a way out, though,' mused Donald. 'There must be ... I wish I could see it.'

'I'm beginning to see it,' said Morag.

But she refused to reveal what was in her heart.

For the time being, Peter McAllister was triumphant. He had Morag under his thumb again, and the preacher was discomfited. All was well.

On occasion, of course, the worm turned; but then, Peter had not the eyes to read all that it portended.

'I'm thinkin', father,' said Morag, after she had been compelled to listen to a particularly scathing criticism of her hero, of his errors and his heresies, 'Maister Strachan may have the right of it after all.'

Peter McAllister eyed his offspring with stupefaction . . . almost, indeed, with the unreasoning panic a man might feel whose pet lamb had suddenly turned and bitten him.

‘Aye; you and Tighnaheugh talk as if all wisdom ended in 1843. Surely we’ve come a-ways since then.’

‘Haud your tongue, lassie,’ said Peter McAllister mechanically. ‘What d’ye ken about it? There were giants in those days, I’d have ye mind.’

It was something he had often said before, as well Morag knew. She was ready for him.

‘Aye; I’ve no doubt. But even a dwarf on the shoulder o’ a giant can see a lang way farther.’

The souter shook a clenched fist in his daughter’s face.

‘Ye got that frae Strachan,’ he thundered. ‘Dinna attempt to deny it. Ye canna tell me.’

Morag had no thought of denying it.

‘That is as may be,’ she said; ‘but . . . but it makes good sense.’

There was only one thing to do in such a case, if parental authority was to be maintained.

‘Leave the room,’ shouted her father. ‘Leave the room this meenit. I’ll no listen to any more bairnly bletherin’ frae the likes o’ you.’

‘I’m coming on nineteen,’ Morag submitted; but obediently she left the room.

‘Whiles, I think the lassie’s possessed,’ Peter told Sneddon despondently.

‘Aye,’ that worthy assented. ‘It was high time

she was removed frae Strachan's influence. He disseminates a most upsettin' doctrine.'

And things went from bad to worse inevitably. Even as Morag avoided chance meetings with Donald, lest she make things harder for him in a village already agitated and distracted, so Donald avoided her, lest he make things harder for her at home. A vast estranging sea might have rolled between.

Which was desperately hard. For she loved Donald with all her warm young soul. She had never made any attempt to deceive herself in the matter, nor, indeed, to conceal it. It was all quite apparent for him to see if he had eyes to see. It was perfectly spontaneous and impulsive. She had never loved any one else.

Yet she knew that all she could ever get out of it was the mere joy of loving.

Who was she, to lift her eyes to Donald Strachan? . . . and so on, and so forth.

And, woman-like, she often had misgivings. Donald made his avoidance of her so apparent. That was precisely as it should be . . . but she could not help, on occasion, feeling herself badly used. She wondered if she had offended him . . . if, for instance, he had misinterpreted her entirely praiseworthy avoidance of him. Possibly, he just despised her as a silly little girl. Perhaps he only thought of her now as one of the hostile group, who had bred divisions and strife in his parish. Perhaps he did not bother to think of her at all. Morag

felt a choking in her throat, of which she was entirely unashamed; and her eyes were wet. Life was unco hard on a dependent maid.

But Donald Strachan was her sole bond with the little clachan, and, for his sake, it were a bond better broken. At all events, Ardarroch was fast becoming altogether intolerable.

CHAPTER XIV

THE JUDGMENT OF CÆSAR

THEN suddenly, like a thunderbolt out of a perfectly clear sky, came the blow that knocked the United Free Kirk galley-west, turned the whole situation upside down, and, indeed, shook Scotland to its very foundations. A shattering, devastating blow.

Without the slightest warning given, the House of Lords, highest authority in the land, reversed the decision of the Scottish courts, decided that the Seven Brethren were veritably the sole representatives of the great Free Kirk that had been founded at the Disruption, and with one lavish gesture handed over to them three perfectly good colleges, eight hundred churches and manses, millions of pounds sterling...and forthwith turned light-heartedly to other affairs. Just like that.

It was seismic...cataclysmal. The bottom dropped out of the world.

The Church which had always been so jealous of the prerogatives of State had made appeal unto Cæsar, and Cæsar, magnanimously, had showered upon it wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

For a time the Unionists were numb and speechless, stricken with a nightmare sense of topsy-turvydom, of mingled tragedy and farce, which

threatened their reason. Staid and erudite clerics groped their way through the eccentric anomalies of the situation, like any Alice in Wonderland. Elders and deacons, aghast, rubbed their eyes and pinched themselves, entirely unwilling to believe they could be broad awake.

And from disinterested onlookers came such a roar of laughter as rocked the stars. This was David and Goliath all over again... the triumph of the pygmy. It never fails to delight the heart.

But it was no laughing matter to some quarter of a million earnest religious folk in Scotland... aye, to millions, when they came to ponder the matter. For a precedent had been created that discountenanced anything in the way of growth or progress, on pain of forfeiture of all possessions. Never a denomination that had made some real advance in faith and intelligence but was at the mercy of any little disgruntled group, resentful of such development.

Sheer lunacy; but the law.

'Was it tae be supposed,' demanded Miss Mirren Leitch of the bakery in Ardarroch, and she actually spoke for Scotland at large, 'that a wheen Episcopalian bodies, presided over by a Jew Chancellor down to London, could comprehend even the beginning of it?'

That went shrewdly to the root of the matter. The Lords' decision was an insult to the Scottish Bench, and an outrage to half the people in the

land. Indignation meetings were held, voicing such indignation as had never perhaps been voiced before. An ecclesiastical and political ferment was created which had had no parallel in Scotland since the days of the Covenanters. England, of course, was responsible for the whole catastrophe. Civil war was by no means beyond the bounds of possibility.

Even as Sneddon of Tighnaheugh, with a new-born smile of triumph on his saturnine countenance, was gathering the faithful in Ardarroch to a solemn service of thanksgiving, Mirren Leitch was chanting:

‘Scots, wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victorie.’

She demanded another Bannockburn.

The thanksgiving service, in consequence, was held in the barn, rather than in the kirk to which the Wee Frees had already a perfect legal title.

With a kind of awe Willie Bannerman and Hector Pitcaithly, between them, summed up the college situation.

‘Aye, aye,’ said Willie; ‘and they’ve ta’en the colleges, have they! Imphm! And these stick-in-the-muds would supplant men like Rainy, and George Adam Smith, and Marcus Dods!’

‘Great men, and gifted!’ said Hector, with solemn nod of head.

‘I’ve heard tell, ye ken, that students come a’

the way frae America, and Australia, and South Africa, to sit at their feet.'

'Aye, men will aye come frae the uttermost parts o' the earth to hear the wisdom o' Solomon, and bring wi' them gifts of ivory and apes and peacocks ...'

This was a heaven-sent opportunity to Willie.

'Hech, sirs!' said he. 'It's a terrible thing when the apes and peacocks come, an' dethrone Solomon.'

There was little of calm in the United Church. Few came well out of the test. The defeated litigants were stirred to mutiny and rage. Some ministers, indeed, on the following Sabbath displayed such eloquence against the judges and the judgment as they had never been wont to display against Satan and Sin.

All in all, a trying time!

And the Wee Frees did not let the grass grow under their feet. Later that very week, an official notice was posted on the door of the kirk in Ardarroch, enjoining any of the sect calling themselves the United Free Church of Scotland from making further use of the building, and so on, and so on ... God save the King!

The injunction crystallized before the very eyes of Donald's adherents, and rudely impressed on them what they felt to be a crying iniquity. Not a man or woman of their number but took occasion to visit the kirk, and read the notice, down to the benediction and the very printer's name, with appropriate comments.

Angus Kilpatrick was all for hastening forthwith for his paint-pot, and adding: 'Let us prey!' He was a handy man with the brush. But he was dissuaded. Angry passions might arise, and heads might be broken; but a legal notice was still sacrosanct.

There was little work done in Ardarroch that day. The ordinary routine of the house must needs be interrupted when the very foundations are shattered. Douce women and mild men were stung to wild-eyed fury. And when they were reminded of some of the Counsels of Perfection from Holy Writ, they viewed them with singular distaste.

Involuntarily, they harked back to the Old Testament, and rude ungente times.

'To everything there is a season . . . a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to cast stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time of war, and a time of peace . . .'

'Hear that, now!'

They understood that.

They could eye the triumphant Wee Frees with nothing of embracement in their thoughts. They were all for war. The time had arrived to cast stones.

'Blessed are the peacemakers . . .'

'Aye; but whiles they spoil everything.'

True; the Wee Frees, to their credit, had taken their departure peaceably enough aforetime. That

was to be expected. They were a small dissentient minority, in revolt against their lawfully constituted Church authorities. They were the non-conformists, and the non-conformist must needs gang his ain gait. They had left the kirk of their own free will, cutting themselves adrift from the goodly fellowship, refusing any longer to keep step with marching events. They had no standing. The Free Church of Scotland, forsooth! It was to laugh.

But the eviction of the United Frees was a different matter altogether... a matter inequitable, nefarious, revolting, and entirely insufferable. They had complied with every law that was binding on heart and conscience. Who gave the Sas-senach the right to tell a Gael what he must believe in order that he may retain his kirk? The same fierce question had assailed southern ears over and over again lang syne. It was unanswerable. What insight had a when Episcopalian Law Lords and a Jew Chancellor into the inscrutable Presbyterian soul?

The Scotch may be the most taciturn nation on the face of the earth, but tongues wagged fast enough in Ardarroch those days, and wickedly at that. Complaints, recriminations, threats, challenges, rose thickly to the unresponsive heavens. A very Babel of wrath and sedition. The mob were reaching for their pikes and scythe-blades. One could hear the thunder of tumbrels.

And Donald soon realized he had his work cut out for him if he were going to conduct a with-

drawal from the kirk as orderly and decorous and resigned as that of the Wee Frees on the occasion when the Scottish courts denied them.

From hour to hour the excitement spread and intensified. A little member is the tongue; but, behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth. Is it not writ in the Book of Proverbs: 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue'? And there were those in Ardarroch who were made drunk with their own eloquence. Violence hovered near . . . red-handed, sharp-fanged violence.

And Colin Urquhart the only representative of law and order within miles.

Aye; Donald Strachan had good reason to be dismayed. He knew and deplored what had happened in other parts of Scotland when the Wee Frees were dispossessed. He had no desire to see it happen in Ardarroch; and the kindling for it was there. Manfully he labored to avert the conflagration. He was very jealous for the spirit of his little community . . . that it should stand the test. Bigness he asked of them in adversity, and yearned over them that they might reveal it. But it was something hard to find.

A meeting was hastily summoned in the school-house; and he pleaded with his people for patience and forbearance. The decision of the House of Lords was not Equity, but it was the Law, and the Law must be upheld. Girn, if they must . . . though the less girning, the better . . . but no overt act, no violence, no lowering of the standard and forsaking of their ideals.

They heard him sullenly, and kept all the arguments that he wanted to answer locked in their breasts.

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you” . . . A great beatitude!’

‘Aye; but it spoils everything.’

And, after the meeting, they gathered in little knots on the roadway, buzzing like bees in a byke . . . compact little knots that broke up on his approach and cohered again behind his back. He knew what it meant. He had seen all that sort of thing happen long ago down by the Broomielaw. It boded no good. Generally, it presaged punitive visitation of the district by stern people with truncheons. He returned to the manse with a heavy heart and a strange disquiet.

Yet, after all, what was to be feared? Men like McKelvie and Leitch and Bannerman and Parlane had their heads screwed on the right way. Dependable men. They were dumfounded, of course, and sore provoked . . . it was enough to scunner any one . . . but they would simmer down. On the morrow, when they had slept over it, he would have his way with them. He strove to reassure himself; but his fears would not down.

From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and
hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all un-
charitableness,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From battle and murder, and from sudden death;

From all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion . . .

Good Lord, deliver us.

The Litany of the English Church was about as foreign to Donald's mind as the Zend Avesta; but his thoughts were running on these lines. Well he knew, in the heart of him, there was deep need of deliverance.

Trouble was brewing in Ardarroch fast enough.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF THE HARVEST MOON

(1)

So the Saturday night came on that was to be a memorable Saturday night in Ardarroch history.

Donald was busy with his sermons and far behind in his preparation. It had been a week of interruptions, of mental distraction, of alarms and excursions. And, even as he worked, his mind would wander off to the catastrophe that had befallen. It haunted him. He would minister no more in the beloved little sanctuary, that was consecrated by the joys, fears, sorrows, confessions of his people, the worship of generations, a myriad prayers. It was become the temple of the God of wrath and judgment. It was all pretty hard . . .

Some one rapped frantically on the study door, and Donald sprang to his feet with a queer foreboding. It was an unheard-of thing on a Saturday night. What was come to pass?

The door swung wide; and Mrs. Gibbie, the gaunt house-keeper, stood breathless and trembling before him. The very sight of her was evil tidings.

'Oh, Maister Strachan, I'm all of a dither! . . . Sic ongoings! Sic . . .'

'Steady a moment,' said Donald, with outward

calm that ill expressed his real emotions. 'If you've word of aught, let's have it.'

Mrs. Gibbie made a fresh start.

'Word of aught! Aye, is there. Here's McAllister's lass up to say they're bent on burning Sneddon's ricks, and haply his house forby . . .'

'What's this? . . . What's this? . . .'

'Aye, and Sneddon and McAllister and others waitin' them wi' shotguns, and . . . Eh! but there'll be murder done this nicht!'

'Ye say Morag brought the word?'

Donald was conscious of a queer stir of soul that owed nothing to the actual tidings told.

'Aye; she's greetin' in the lobby the now, puir motherless bairn!'

Donald went downstairs, three at a time.

'Ho, Morag!' he hailed her as he went.

The cheer in his voice was balm to the perturbed little messenger. She had a feeling that the end of the world was at hand . . . earthquake, and fire, and the abomination of desolation in the holy place.

'Aye, Maister Strachan,' said Morag out of the dusk of the lobby.

'What's all this about burning Sneddon's ricks?'

'McFarlane, the laird's grieve, heard them up to the bar in Craigeness, and he rode in to tell Tigh-naheugh . . .'

'Then they're not at it yet?'

'No yet.'

The minister heaved a sigh of relief.

'That's grr-eat, Morag.'

'There's Tam Gowrie . . .'

'Him that Tighnaheugh dismissed for the drink,' said Mrs. Gibbie, who had taken her stand on the third step from the bottom, and was now ready to play the part of Greek Chorus.

'And a wheen o' his cronies frae Craigeness and Ardencravie, and The Neuk, all roaring drunk.'

'Tam's the ringleader, I'll be bound,' from the stairs.

'How many are there, think ye?' asked Donald.

'Seven or eight . . . ten maybe. I'm no right sure. And there'll be more. They're going to raise the village and march to Tighnaheugh. Sneddon came for faither, and I heard him say they were weel able to defend their ain; and they'll spot the kirk-members that are present, and have the law on them later.'

'Oh, they will, will they?'

'It'll be a sore ding to the United Frees . . . so they say.'

'A gey sore ding,' said Mrs. Gibbie, antiphonally.

'I wonder,' said Donald.

A strangely secular fire had already kindled in his eyes, and years were dropping away from him. Disaffection in his own flock wrung his heart. But this was a different matter altogether . . . a matter with which it would be sheer gladness to cope, in his kirk's quarrel, and to the maintenance of its honor. He was the boy again who turned his jacket

outside in for an electoral battle at Gilmorehill, and that with sufficient eagerness. Circumspectly enough he had walked for years, as a minister of the Gospel, but there are situations in which circumspection may well be laid aside with a clear conscience . . . and such situations are not unwelcome to a robust soul.

‘There’ll be fighting and shooting,’ Morag continued fearfully. ‘And . . . and faither’d half-kill me if he kenned I was telling; but I just had to come. Sneddon wants a towzie, and he’ll turn it back on you and yours. Fine I ken him. Oh, Maister Strachan, what’s to be done? . . . What’s to be done?’

‘That’s the question!’ said the chorus.

‘We’ll find a thing to do,’ said Donald cheerfully, and he laid a hand upon the shoulder of the little maid. It was wondrous comforting. ‘Morag, ye’re a proper wee brick, and no mistake. I’ll never forget what you’ve done for me this night. Aye, it was like your great and gracious ways. Will ye do yet a thing more?’

Vehement nodding of the dark head. As if he needed to ask!

‘Drop the word to Leitch and Bannerman to meet me here as soon as ever they can . . . No; better make it Andra McKelvie, and Pitcaithly, and Parlane. They’re on your way. I’ll get some of the others. There may be little time to lose. Raise the village, will they! I’m minded to save them the bother. And you, Morag . . .’ He gave a

little shake to the shoulder, on which his hand rested in true comradely fashion. 'Get you home, and stay there.'

'Aye,' not very convincingly.

'You promise me to bide indoors?'

'I promise . . . But I'll maybe no can keep the promise.' Morag was ever the soul of truth.

'You must keep your promise, Morag. I'm not going to have you running into danger. Do you hear? There's no saying what may happen when the passions o' foolish men get the upper hand. Mind, I'm putting you on your honor.'

'Aye; but, Maister Strachan, ye won't do aught foolhardy yoursel . . . Please!'

It was Donald, and only Donald, for whom she feared . . . his personal safety, his reputation, his standing in the community, his peace of mind. Bless her heart! Her solicitude was very dear to him.

'You need never fear, Morag. There'll be little risk to me . . . Now, run.'

Morag ran.

(2)

It was not without difficulty that Donald persuaded his own little band to his purpose. Some of them, undoubtedly, would have liked finely to see Sneddon of Tighnaheugh get something of what was coming to him, whether or no they had part in it, and to see a little left over for McAllister. Aye, and if any one had cared to perch Miss Turnbull on

a ducking-stool, say, it is to be hoped they would have interfered; certainly they would never have strained themselves with overmuch haste. They were bruised in spirit, and disgruntled, and in no wise benignly minded to the enemy.

'I dinna want to be mixed up in it,' said Hector Pitcaithly. 'It'll be a maist reprehensible brawl.'

Inglis and McKelvie vaguely shook their heads. They were essentially men of peace.

'What are we to do?' demanded Gavin Leitch. 'I'm no that eager to put mysel out for Sneddon, ye ken.'

'Never heed Sneddon the now,' said Donald. 'Would you put yourself out a trifle for me?'

'Aye, that I would,' said Gavin loyally.

The heads of Inglis and McKelvie turned decidedly from a lateral to an up-and-down movement. They, too, were staunch in their attachment. If it was put in the way of a personal favor . . .

'We're with ye, laddie,' said Archie Parlane. He had forgotten for the moment the respect due his minister.

Willie Bannerman was swinging a purposeful cudgel at invisible opponents, and game for anything.

'Then, see here. These drunken ne'er-do-weels are out to satisfy a personal grudge; and they think this a fine chance to do it in the robes o' righteousness. What have they to do wi' us?

They're not our folk; but we'll be left to bear the reproach of it. And that's precisely what Sneddon wants should happen.'

'Ho!' said Hector fiercely.

'Aye; they're the bonnie crusaders! They've the cheek to take it upon themselves to represent the United Free Kirk against the Wee Frees... which, for my part, I take as a personal affront. These runagate loons! Who gave them authority to act for us, I'd like to know? Why should we be...'

'Imphm... I see.'

Gavin Leitch was ever slow in the uptake, but light had broken in upon him.

Hector Pitcaithly, at a loss for appropriate comment, again said 'Ho!'... more fiercely than before.

'Aye,' Inglis decided. 'If that's the way o' 't, it maun be put a stop to.'

'And have ye considered a plan o' campaign?' asked Andra McKelvie.

'We'll borrow one,' said Donald. 'D'ye mind of an occasion when a wheen rapscallions plotted against the Jews, and actually got it enacted by the laws of the Medes and Persians that on a certain day the Jews should be blotted out?'

'Aye, it's in the Book of Esther,' said Hector Pitcaithly appreciatively.

'And what happened?... Let's suppose, for the purposes o' the moment, that the Wee Frees are the Chosen People, and we the Gentiles.'

‘They’d like that,’ said Archie, with a chuckle. ‘They’d like it fine.’

‘Ye may recall, those in authority over the Gentiles just decided that the massacre should not take place. They sent the word around, as we have done; and, when the hour struck, all the substantial and dependable folk in the land ranged themselves on the side o’ the prospective victims, and . . . and it went unco hard wi’ the conspirators.’

‘Fine, man; fine!’ quoth Gavin Leitch, stirred to a new unholy enthusiasm. ‘And they hanged Haman on a gallows fifty cubits high.’

‘I wouldn’t just say it was advisable to go that length in this case,’ said Donald cautiously; ‘but I can see ye’ve got the idea.’

So the doughty little band waited there in the manse garden for the conspirators to put in an appearance. And it was full moon. Not at all the sort of night a miscreant should have chosen for a deed of evil; but the deed of evil was masquerading as a crusade, and the time was ripe. If there happened to be a gorgeous harvest moon at the moment, it could not be helped.

There was no particular need of concealment or of silence; but the spirit of ambushade was heavy on them. They crouched among the bushes, and their lips were sealed. There was little of the man of action in any of them, save Donald, and perhaps Gavin Leitch . . . contemplative, slow-moving, quiet-living men, to whom physical clash was foreign and unpleasing. They had no conception

what of violence and fury lay before them. They feared the unknown. They shrank from it. But you could never have persuaded them to desert the cause.

Slowly, desperately slowly, the time dragged past.

The night seemed full of mysterious noises: whisperings, rustlings, footsteps of unseen hosts. The sea muttered uneasily in its sleep. The very wind, when it gave a bit sough through the trees, was laden with alarm.

A corn-crake started in an adjoining field, and jangled Archie Parlane's nerves till he could stand it no longer. Three times he stole out, actually on tiptoe; and the rasping crake arose again as soon as ever he returned.

'Ye canna find it,' he complained bitterly. 'It's naught but a wandering voice.'

An owl hooted, suddenly and weirdly, from a thicket behind the manse; and Inglis was flat on his belly among the bushes. A little shame-facedly, he picked himself up, and took a new grip on himself.

'Man,' he whispered to Archie Parlane, 'if it was no the Lord's work, I could do wi' a bit nip frae the bottle.'

He was answered with a deep-drawn sigh that expressed a whole world of yearning.

It began to seem as if it must have been a false alarm, after all. Or perhaps... horrid thought! ... the plotters had changed their minds, and turned off to attack some other prominent dis-

senter. But no; Tam Gowrie's quarrel was with Sneddon; and, to reach Tighnaheugh from Craigieness, they must needs come by the manse.

The tension was terrible. Andra McKelvie had a fearful crick in his back, crouching behind the fuchsias like a lurking jungle beast, and it never even occurred to him to change his position.

But, at long last, they came. A drunken song in the night . . . then coarse jests and laughter . . . the unsteady tramp of feet on the hard road . . .

'Man, but they're fightin' fou,' said Gavin Leitch.

Willie Bannerman took a firmer grip on his cudgel.

Nearer and nearer they came. They had turned into the sea-road. They were abreast the fuchsias.

'Now,' said Donald.

He stepped forth, closely attended by his trusty henchmen, and confronted the invaders of his domain. 'Halt!' the word was rapped out like a pistol-shot.

The song abruptly ceased. Some one dropped an oath. They had not counted on opposition on the line of march, and they resented it. It was plain enough there had been abundance of strong drink.

'Well, lads; what's to do? Wherefore this unseemly disturbance o' a bonnie night?'

Tam Gowrie thrust a flushed face close to that of the minister.

'Get ye back indoors, Maister Strachan. What have ye to do wi' us?'

'That depends on who ye are,' said Donald cheerfully; 'aye, and on what ye're after. I'm in charge o' the United Free Kirk of Ardarroch, if it's anything to the point.'

Tam glowered at him, and threatening murmurs arose among his followers.

'Wha said aught about the United Free Kirk? Ye've no right to hinder us.'

'And ye canna do it,' said another, whom Donald recognized as an Auld Kirk crofter.

In the moonlight he was calmly taking stock of the group. It was larger than he had anticipated; perhaps a score of farm-lads and herds, mostly inflamed with drink, a couple of tinkers subsidized for the occasion, a few of his own folk, gathered from outlying crofts in the parish . . . Menzies, for one, stirred by real righteous indignation, eager to get on with the business, entirely implacable and unashamed.

'Queer thing,' said an angry voice, 'if we canna hae a bit airing withoot interference!'

'Oh,' said Donald, 'if it's naught but a daunder in the moonlight, there are folk here are minded to march wi' ye . . . Lead on, Macduff.'

There was something disarming about Donald's good humor, and it was hard to raise objections to his proposal.

'Ye're no wanted,' said one.

'Hoot!' said another. 'The mair, the merrier.' Laughter arose.

'Aye, aye. Let them come.'

And the march was resumed.

At the shouting and the singing, the village folk came to their doors; and many joined the procession . . . some out of mere curiosity, others with a shrewd idea of what was toward, and evident desire to see it carried through. Ardarroch, as a rule, is somewhat lacking in excitement; and here was the promise of excitement enough.

'Ye'll never can stop them,' said Andra McKelvie fearfully. But Donald was little lacking in confidence.

Here and there some one made as if to join, and, catching sight of the minister, hesitated.

'Come on,' said Donald reassuringly. 'It's a grand night for a stroll.'

And, as they went their way, he and his lieutenants insidiously proselytized among the sober folk in the crowd, pointing out the issues involved, and subtly discrediting the moving spirits. The honor of the United Free Kirk was at stake.

They found some hard to budge, though.

Menzies, for instance, a strong, stern, silent farmer, was mad clear through.

'They'd take the kirk frae us, would they?' he said. 'I mind weel how my father and mother scraped and saved to help build it; and I'll hae something oot o' Sneddon and his kind. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. That's the policy. Man, I was wed in it, and my bairns were christened in it, and never a Sabbath day have I been absent frae my pew. The very stones are dear to

me. No, no; I'd do muckle for Maister Strachan, but no this. Let nature tak' its course.'

At the boundary of Tighnaheugh Farm, Donald called a halt; and at once his men swept to the van and ably closed the line of march.

'*Now* what?' he demanded.

'None o' your business,' some one ejaculated.

Clamor arose, and shouts of: 'Clear the way!'

'Aye, but if ye come in the name o' the United Frees, it is my business,' insisted Donald. 'This has gone far enough, for your intentions are revealed. Get ye to your homes. Tighnaheugh and his men are waitin' wi' guns, and there are these here, too, will join them.'

'Go hame yersel,' said a voice.

'You are all known,' Donald warned them. 'If there's violence done, it's your wives and bairns will suffer.'

The obvious truth of this gathered to his side a waverer or two. Donald, to his delight, saw that he had the upper hand, even without help from the defenders of the farm.

The clamor increased. Drink and mob-passion must needs have their way.

'You stick to the Sabbath day, and leave the rest to us.'

'Never heed the meenister. On to Tighnaheugh!'

Tam Gowrie was shaking his fist in the minister's face.

'We'll no gang hame,' he vociferated, 'till we've seen justice done.'

'Who made thee a ruler and a judge, Tam Gowrie?' Donald challenged him.

'I'm what ye might call self-appointed,' said Tam frankly. 'And there's going to be some bonnie scrappin' done if you an' yours dinna clear the way. Come on, lads!'

'Scrapping!' said Donald. 'Good enough! Let's have it here and now.'

Tam was for the moment thunderstruck.

'But ye may take it frae me,' continued the minister, 'there's going to be no illegal violence done to Sneddon's person or property in the name o' my kirk.'

Resentment flamed to fever heat. Menzies stormed in heroic abandon, and flung himself fiercely against the line of defense. A dozen impetuous spirits in a moment joined battle. But the line held fast.

'Geal is Dearg a suas!' The eldritch war-whoop of Menzies of that ilk lifted eerily over the hubbub.

It acted on Hector Pitcaithly like the jab of a goad. The blood of forgotten caterans pounded in his pulses, and he went into battle, a very devastating hurricane of whirling fists and Gaelic invective. Aye, but Gaelic's the bonnie, bonnie tongue for a towzie.

Wallop! An unfortunate foeman bit the dust before him.

Wallop! . . .

'Fear eil air son Eachainn!' skirled the Pitcaithly. Another for Hector!

Tam Gowrie struck out viciously at the minister. Donald easily side-stepped, and, getting his drunken assailant by the scruff of the neck, shook him until his teeth rattled.

All up and down the line the battle raged.

Willie Bannerman made fine play with his cudgel on both the hireling tinkers at once. Gavin Leitch was performing dastardly deeds on an orra-man, against whom he had long had a grudge.

'Fancy me doing all this for Sneddon!' he gasped. 'Me!'

But his victim was in no condition for flights of fancy.

No one could follow the course of events. Each man did the duty that lay to his hand, confident that the duty to come would be made plain to him. Now and then arose a bellow of rage or pain, as blow followed blow with bewildering rapidity; and hefty men flew about like shuttle-cocks.

Inglis's pacifist tendencies could never have been suspected by a casual spectator; and Andra McKelvie and Archie Parlane, once their blood was up, astounded themselves.

Andra had a quaint way of aye licking his fingertips and clapping his hands together before he struck . . . preliminaries that sadly handicapped him in getting his blow in first. He had been sore smitten on the nose, and was bent on wreaking vengeance twenty-fold. He bled horribly.

'Geal is Dearg a suas!'

Menzies was still in the thick of it.

Everything was chaos. A man might be getting along finely when he was torn from his opponent, and found himself hotly engaged with a comparative stranger. And a solid little mass would go squirming and writhing like an octopus on the road.

‘Have ye had enough?’ Donald grimly demanded of the leader of invasion, heedless that Tam was entirely incapable of answer.

He shook him some more.

One of the tinkers, disengaged for the moment, aimed a blow at him with a stick, missing his head, to land him a harmless glancing stroke on the shoulder, and on the instant was confronted with a raging Highland volcano in the person of Menzies . . . Menzies, who had abjured Donald’s leadership and taken service under the banner of Tam Gowrie.

‘Smite the meenister, would ye, ye godless wastrel! Tak’ that . . . and that . . . and that . . .’

The tinker took all three.

Donald paused long enough in his absorbing task to thank his elder; and found himself in the center of a weirdly gyrating bunch of five more or less entwined bodies. A hairy arm was about his eyes, binding his head to a brawny chest in the background. He knew there were five, for two of them were wrestling for the rest of his body, and there was a smell of whiskey immediately before him. He was almost immobilized himself, but he could hear labored breathing and the impact of blows.

Getting an arm free, he struck blindly at the smell of whiskey.

Some one said, 'Ooch!' and dropped.

Then there was a muffled thud behind him.

The owner of the hairy arm said, 'Ooch!' and took no further interest.

With Archie Parlane's assistance, Donald flung free of his remaining opponents, and paused a moment to mop his damp brow.

He was conscious of a surprising delight in this relapse to more primitive conditions . . . the hot struggle of man with man . . . fist-fighting for what might almost have been termed a pacifist ideal. For few things are more comforting than the unleashing of the natural man with a good conscience. Of course, Donald had no time to formulate all that. He was simply aware of real inward glee, as he raised his hand to his beaded brow.

At which a horny fist smote him mightily in the solar plexus.

Donald said, 'Ooch!' and sat down in the roadway.

But the fight was really over.

Tam Gowrie and his retainers found to their astonishment that they were hopelessly outnumbered, and they soon lost heart. They were bruised, and beaten up, and bloody, and they recognized defeat when they saw it. A few broken heads there were, but the damage was not serious . . . nothing to what it easily might have been. At the tardy approach of Sneddon and Lang Peter, doubling up

with reinforcements, the avenging band scattered into the night . . . just melted away like snow off a dyke.

Fortunately, Donald had gotten his breath back. 'Dinna fire,' he shouted. 'The battle's over.'

Archie Parlane tore his shirt open, that the cool night air might play on his fevered frame.

'Man,' he announced to the world at large, 'if ye dropped me in cauld water, I'd fizz.'

Gavin Leitch was standing on one leg, gently investigating a damaged shin with caressing fingertips.

And Menzies . . . Donald had never seen Menzies so thoroughly happy and satisfied before, so overflowing with the milk of human kindness. This thing had done him real good. He was alternately spitting blood and exulting over the event.

'What a towzie! . . . Oh, what a bonnie towzie!'

And the smile on him uplifted the heart.

'May it please you to explain this breach o' the peace?' said Colin Urquhart, who was clothed with authority.

'Aye; that's what we want to ken,' said Sneddon sourly.

Fine weel he kenned, too.

'Man,' said Donald lightly, 'we were just protecting you from a wastrel hand o' yours and a few drunken cronies . . . aye, and we smote them hip and thigh.'

He grinned contentedly.

'And what for should you and yours interfere?'

demanded Sneddon. He was balked of his prey, and sore vexed.

Gavin chuckled something over his shoulder about coals of fire, as he limped into the night with the aid of Bannerman and Andra McKelvie. Willie waved his cudgel gleefully in farewell. They would have liked fine to have stopped and talked it all over; but the aversion to dealings between the Jews and the Samaritans was as nothing to that between the Unionists and the Wee Frees.

Donald gave answer.

‘For the honor o’ the United Free Kirk, in whose name they dared to come. That is a sacrilege we canna tolerate.’

Sneddon grunted.

‘But, gin they ever return, fighting for their ain hand, ye’re welcome to work your will on them. And . . . we bid you good-night.’

‘Good-night,’ said Farmer Sneddon.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GORDIAN KNOT

(1)

No; Donald Strachan, it seemed, would not countenance an offensive. There was still, however, the possibility of a defensive campaign; and already Mirren Leitch was pondering it in her heart.

Who can tell how these things get about? It is practically certain that no one left a house on the Sabbath morning; yet, early, it was noised abroad somehow that Miss Leitch of the bakery had taken up a position in the kirk overnight, in despite of the interdict, and was armed with sandwiches and a pitchfork.

Her choice of a weapon was severely criticized by sticklers for the poetic fitness of things; but all were ready to admit that stirring events were impending. Mirren Leitch was a doughty garrison.

It was natural then that the Sabbath procession should forget that the Union service was to be held in the schoolhouse, and carry on, as though by force of habit, to the door of the kirk. And with them, it is to be feared, there mingled a goodly proportion of the adherents of the Auld Kirk, though their bell was frantically calling them to their own fold.

At the door of the kirk strong men stood at bay,

earnestly striving to maintain a decorous Sabbath mien, while Miss Leitch stood indomitably in the doorway, pitchfork at the ready, and dared them to come on.

No Sneddon was going to hold forth in that kirk in the name of a wheen dissenters, while she had breath left in her body.

‘Whatna way to spend the Sabbath day!’ exclaimed Peter McAllister in horrified accents.

‘Aye,’ said the Amazon grimly, with a significant out-thrust of her weapon, ‘and it’s nothing to the way the Sabbath’ll be spent if ye persist in the endeavor to tak’ this kirk frae your lawful-ordained meenister.’

‘The law is on our side,’ protested Lang Peter. ‘The highest powers that obtain in the land have ordained that ye are in the wrang. Let every soul, said the Apostle Paul, be subject to the higher powers.’

Miss Leitch clearly indicated that she would be glad to have these higher powers come and offer to subject her.

Lang Peter countered with another quotation from Paul, upon whom, apparently, he had been establishing himself.

‘Whoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist will receive to theirsels damnation.’

Mirren snorted contemptuously.

‘Ye might as weel save your breath, Peter McAllister. Ye canna persuade me that your nefari-

ous doings are the ordinance o' God. Get ye hame, and meditate on your iniquities.'

And all the while, the onlookers, partisans of either side and neutrals indiscriminately mingled, stared, and listened, breathing hard, but moved nor hand nor foot. It had all the appearance of an ancient ordeal by champion.

'The ruler is the minister o' God to thee for good.' Peter had not yet exhausted the Epistle to the Romans. 'But, if thou do evil, be afraid . . .'

Sneddon was keeping out of this. He had already tried conclusions with Miss Leitch, and he shrank from further encounter. Only Morag, among the faithful, viewed the proceedings with a certain sympathy that ill became a Wee Free.

Meanwhile, Colin Urquhart had hurried home to don his uniform and cloak himself in what he fondly took to be irresistible authority. He had never been noted for any objectionable eagerness to enforce the law, or he would have led a lonely, lonely life; but this was a special occasion.

He returned; and marched, with ominous scrunch of gravel, right up to the kirk, and up the steps. All made way for the embodiment of law and order, and with tense expectancy awaited the issue. Some of the older folks stole up a little nearer, and got their hands behind their ears, fearful lest they might miss a word of what was to come.

'Noo, Miss Leitch . . .' he began persuasively.

She met him with something between a curse and a curtsy.

‘And whit can I do for you, Colin Urquhart, ye puir feckless body?’ . . . A good start.

‘I dinna want to be hard on you,’ he explained almost appealingly. He was aware that he might have to get his bread sent all the way down from Glasgow in the future, and Leitch’s breakfast rolls were famous throughout three parishes. ‘But ye’re breakin’ the law o’ the land, and, in the name o’ the Law, I summons ye to come oot o’ that, and allow the lawful owners o’ the kirk to tak’ possession. Come awa noo. Otherwise, it will be my bounden duty to . . .’

Miss Leitch was in high feather. The blood of one knows not what Deborahs and Jaels throbbed in her pulses. A mother in Israel! . . . Blessed above women shall be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite! Here she was, leading a forlorn hope, with the undoubted approval of her conscience, and boundless faith in her ability to go through with it. What more could the heart desire?

Aye; what she wanted to declaim was:

‘This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth.’

That was just the way she felt about it.

What she actually said was less highfalutin, but even more impressive:

‘Colin Urquhart . . . do . . . ye . . . want . . . to . . . be . . . punctured?’

She advanced the prongs of the fork close to his

waistcoat, and a sudden quiver of her hand suggested revolting things. Colin hastily retreated, missed a step, and sat ignominiously down in the gravel.

‘Violent resistance o’ the police in the lawful discharge o’ his duty,’ Colin was muttering solemnly, as he arose and dusted himself down. ‘That’s a felony.’

He drew a small notebook from his pocket, and sucked the point of a stubby pencil.

‘Your name, woman?’

‘Has the man gone daft?’ Miss Leitch speculated. ‘He’s kenned me frae a bairn.’

What might have happened when he came to demand her age was on the lap of the gods, and a matter for wild conjecture. But a higher authority than Colin was at hand.

Donald, waiting patiently in the old schoolhouse for a congregation which failed to materialize, had grown anxious and ventured out to investigate.

Only once before had his congregation deserted him. He recalled the stormy winter morning when he had faced serried rows of empty pews. Not a member present; not a deacon or elder; not even Peter McAllister himself, to carry in the Bible and Psalm-Book, and start the singing. The wind was howling fury, and the waves shouted in fearless answer. Spray was blown raggedly like smoke, and blattered on the window-panes of the kirk. But that was not enough to keep his flock away. With a deep heart-pang, he had decided that he had

preached the kirk empty. And Morag had suddenly appeared, tousled like a warlock and all breathless, to announce there was a schooner on the rocks over to The Neuk, and all were out to help.

‘I thocht maybe ye’d be wondering, and I ran a’ the way.’

He had lifted up his voice on that occasion and blessed the child . . . to her infinite satisfaction. He would have done it again, but no Morag appeared.

Donald found his errant flock gathered round the accustomed fold, and a single glance took in the situation.

‘Aye, aye, Mirren,’ he said; ‘whatna way’s this to honor the Master ye serve? Did not I bid you lang syne to beware lest the light that is in you be darkness? Did not I warn you?’

It was only the work of a few moments to reduce the too ardent loyalist to tears, and disarm her. Colin Urquhart had already, almost furtively, thrust his little notebook out of sight.

‘And all ye who belong to the United Free Kirk, why is the Lord’s house deserted? Get you gone to your own place. And I shall bide here till every last one of you is on the way.’

It was the shepherd who spoke authoritatively; and sheepishly enough, his flock obeyed.

‘And noo . . .’ He turned gravely to Sneddon of Tighnaheugh, and deep was calling unto deep. ‘Enter in, and do as occasion serve thee; and God be with thee.’

‘And with thee,’ Sneddon handsomely returned. ‘We’ve differed on some things, Donald Strachan; but . . . man, I canna altogether help but respect ye.’

Donald turned sadly away from the little kirk that had meant so much to him. They could worship elsewhere; but the loss of the consecrated place was no light loss . . . the mellow charm of age and history, the echo of the worship of generations. And there were those there, who had wrested it from him, who once had been his friends.

Little fault of his, of course, that the union with the U.P.s had come to pass just at the commencement of his pastorate. Whoever had been pastor, there could have been no unanimity. Yet Donald could not but mourn his divided flock. He was so convinced of his faith . . . the truth of it, the beauty of it; and the seceders would none of it. He felt that he had failed. He ought to have been able to keep them together. He ought to have been able to persuade them. He had made mistakes that had alienated folk from him. He had been indiscreet.

And he sorrowed over the perversity of it all, the misunderstandings and estrangements, with a deep and heartfelt sorrow. For a *padre* does come to love his people. He has gone in and out among them, sharing their joys and their sorrows, confidant of their hopes and their fears, entering into their lives in poignant hours and tragic hours, as no one else is suffered to enter. And here he was forced to watch them, the strong fine bonds all

broken, drift away from him. He was sore in need of a friendly word.

And, as he turned out upon the long dusty road by the sea, a brown little hand was placed upon his arm, and Morag was speaking to him. Even as she spoke, she cast affrighted glances backward, lest her father should have come to seek for her. Donald was not the only one who suffered at the hands of a creed outworn.

'Oh, Maister Strachan,' she said, 'I ken what ye must be feeling. I saw it in your eyes. And my heart's woeful for ye. Ye winna think ower badly o' me? Ye winna think I'm with them?'

'My bonnie, need ye ask that o' me?' he said . . . and paused.

This was no child that looked up into his face. It was a woman distraught . . . a woman, whose fate was carrying her far from her heart's desires. There was something of adoration in her eyes, that made Donald feel very humble, very reverent.

'You're a friend in need, Morag,' he soothed her.

'Am I that?' eagerly.

'And you've done me good this morn.'

'I wish I could sit wi' your folk in the school-house.'

There was infinite wistfulness in her voice.

'Aye, Morag; but ye can worship God most anywhere. And ye maunna chance your father missing you.'

Her face clouded over again.

'There's naught o' worship in my heart amid

them,' she said. 'And I canna thole it . . . I canna thole much more . . .'

'Steady, little chum!' he rallied her. 'There's bound to be a way. We'll look for it together. We must find opportunity to talk it out . . .'

But Morag was not to be comforted.

'I canna thole much more,' she repeated dully. 'But your folk are waitin' . . . God bless ye, Maister Strachan.'

And, before he could stay her, she flung away from him, and was gone.

(2)

The following morning, it was rumored abroad that Morag had run away.

Peter McAllister arose at his usual time, to find that there was no breakfast awaiting him. This was such an outrage as he had never known in his experience . . . an incredible thing. And he had actually nursed his wrath to fever heat before he found to his dismay that there was no daughter on whom to vent it. It hurt. It seared him inwardly. Morag had vanished as from the face of the earth.

And half-a-crown was missing from his trousers pocket. Half-a-crown was the exact fare to Glasgow.

'Aye,' said the purser of the little paddle-boat, when interviewed. 'Morag went up to Glasgow, the early morning run. I had word wi' her, but she was gey incommunicative.'

He could tell no more. At Greenock, where the

passengers transferred to the boat-train, all trace of her ended.

To tell the truth, Lang Peter made no great effort to discover her whereabouts. He gave her credit for intelligence to cover up her tracks if she wanted them covered up. He was sore stricken in the soul of him. But it was only discipline, authority, law, she had sinned against . . . not love. Peter had never given her love. He was bound to miss her sadly as a housekeeper; otherwise, she had meant little to him.

But, that a daughter of his should be not merely a runaway, but a thief! . . . Ichabod! Ichabod!

He looked around for some butt for his barbed shafts.

Donald Strachan!

Who was to blame for it but the young parson? Morag had learned of him, learned laxity, and infidelity, and rebellion, forsaken for his creed the creed of her forefathers, regarded him with a feeling almost akin to idolatry.

Here was an excellent weapon to turn against him; and, when opportunity arose, he was not slow to do it.

‘Aye; ye’ve heard what’s happened . . . Imphm! . . . And doubtless ye’ll be for remindin’ me we maun bow to the blow, when the hand o’ the Lord is heavy upon us. Dinna say it.’ He gave a bitter, mirthless sort of laugh, and changed on the moment to white-lipped wrath. ‘Aye, it would come ill frae you. Dinna say it.’

‘I wasn’t going to say anything of the sort,’ said Donald simply. ‘The hand o’ the Lord has never been as heavy on you as yours on little Morag.’

But Peter heeded him not.

‘Putting all sorts o’ notions in the bairn’s head,’ he accused the minister; ‘aye, and sappin’ her moral sense wi’ your questionings and doubts aboot hell and the wrath o’ God. This is the result: black sin! This is what comes of it. Do ye realize she stole frae me? . . . *Stole!* . . . A daughter o’ mine! . . . My ain flesh and blood!’

Peter writhed in an ecstasy of outraged righteousness.

‘Aye, aye,’ said Donald; ‘she must have been gey hard-pressed, to do such a thing; and I’m thinking she earned it, and much more forby. Yet, if I ken Morag, the poor wee lass’ll never have a moment’s peace till she’s returned it.’

‘I pray it may be so,’ said Peter piously. ‘But I sore doubt she’s on the broad way that leadeth to destruction. Aye, I doubt it. This is but a beginning . . . And who’s to blame? . . . Who was it . . .’

Donald’s sympathy for the bereft father had ebbed fast during the interview.

‘Stop it!’ he said . . . Oh, not particularly loudly or fiercely; but when Donald said it that way, it was rather apt to be stopped, whatever it was. ‘And hearken unto me, Peter McAllister. I’ve preached to you the love divine, and ye never would listen. But, if there had been less talk of sin and wrath down there to Ballymenach, and a little

more revelation of the love of God in the father-heart, Morag would be here now, and as happy as the day is long. Ye had a sacred trust, and ye've betrayed it . . .'

'I never heard the like in a' my life,' stammered Peter, aghast.

'More's the pity. But better late than never. Aye; I'm thinking ye'll find it hard to shift the blame; and, personally, I'd hate to have the blame of it. Whoso shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth o' the sea. That's sound doctrine. Take a hold o' that, will ye, and think it over.'

And Donald left him.

Peter, despite himself, had a furtive glance at the sea.

It offered little reassurance.

It was a cold, gray, gurly sea . . .

A few days later, there came to Ballymenach an envelope, postmarked Glasgow. It enclosed a postal order for two and sixpence.

Peter might have managed to keep it dark if it had not been necessary for him to cash it with Andra McKelvie.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

NATURALLY, the Church situation could not be suffered to endure. It was essentially insufferable. The Scots are fighting mystics, and dangerous when aroused. There was much to rouse them. Their Scottish courts had given sound and sensible judgment, and had been treated with contumely. Their Scottish Presbyterianism had been grievously misread, and travestied, and blasphemed, by benighted Sassenachs who could not possibly comprehend it. Their Scottish kirks and manse had been feloniously wrested from the folk who had built them and paid for them, and handed over to a small and comparatively unknown group of obscurantist ways of thinking and a faith no longer tenable. Who would not have been aroused? The thing was preposterous. The fiery cross was raised. The slogan was 'Home rule for Scotland!' Those who sat in the seats of the mighty were stirred to action. No telling what a day might bring forth. A plague upon this people!

Parliament was hastily convoked out of season, and a Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the matter. On its finding, a Bill was drafted and passed, more hastily than any Bill in history, giving the Commission authority to allocate the property anew in such manner as appeared to the Com-

mission just and right. Then every one drew a long deep breath of relief.

No one had ever heard of a Royal Commission before; but the enraged Northerners were prepared to give it a fair try-out. They felt instinctively that it was precisely the thing wanted then and there. It meant well. The highest court in the land, it appeared, was not so high but that a higher still might be invented, to set Law aside and deal in Equity. It was Equity for which the rampant lion clamored.

So matters were gradually adjusted, more or less to the satisfaction of all. Of course, the successful litigants were favored to a degree. That was to be expected. Churches were given to the Wee Frees wherever it could be proved that a bare third of the members were of that persuasion. But there were few such; and a vast emergency fund grew like a mushroom overnight, that the wherewithal might not be lacking to provide at least temporary shelter for the dispossessed.

Donald's congregation, though, was dispossessed. Ardarroch Kirk finally passed into the hands of the Wee Frees; and a substitute of corrugated iron was already in process of construction . . . a hideous thing, but at least a rallying-place for the Unionists.

Donald Strachan began to question whether it were wise to remain longer in the community. For five somewhat troubled years he had upheld the Christ-revelation of God as against the crude and

terrible concept of a slave-people in the wilderness. He had offered his evangel, as it had convinced his soul; and many had accepted it gladly. The rest would have none of it. His church was divided. He knew he was regarded as a trouble-maker and a disturber of the peace of Zion by various quite sincere folk in Ardarroch. It might be, with the passing of the years, the two factions could be reconciled; but, for the time being, feeling ran high, and he could not avoid the surmise that his very presence there served only to harden their hearts against one another.

A kirk in the Grampians, within easy visiting distance of his beloved Innerneuk, began to make overtures to him; and Donald was inclined to listen.

But Morag . . .

Then came the devastating news that all was not well with Morag . . . nothing very definite; just a whisper that grew and darkened as it passed from lip to lip, as these carried tales always do, strangely disturbing to the soul, even if you refuse to believe it.

Inevitably, it came to Donald Strachan. And he stoutly refused to believe it. Nevertheless he was disturbed.

How he had longed for news! Month after month had passed, and the silence remained unbroken. Peter McAllister, he was convinced, knew nothing. Morag herself sent never a word. And now, at a dark suggestion of evil, the floodgates

were broken down, and all the repressed longings of his soul let loose. He longed with passionate intensity for Morag herself to understand it to him . . . to snug up to him, as once long ago when she was a child, and put her trust in him, and tell him all about it.

She must have had a hard time of it fighting for her own hand in the strange big city. She was only a little thing, an elfin thing, ill-equipped to make her way. She must often have been in sore straits. God! If she had only confided in him her intent to go, let him help in some sort! He hated to think what she must have come through . . .

But he knew she came through with a clean heart, and her eyes were not changed.

Miss Turnbull knew better.

'Colin Urquhart's guid-brother over to Govan saw her, and had word wi' her . . . and the hussy bade him to mind his ain business.'

'Aye, aye; counsel that was doubtless sore needed. But just what does it all amount to?'

'Aye, that's the question. . . . Taken to play-actin' . . . Play-actin'! . . . Peter McAllister's lass! . . . And loose company, so they say . . . and the dear Lord kens what beside. . . . Wi' her upbringing, too! Imphm! Ah, weel, the least said, the soonest mended.'

And head-shakings and lip-pursings, that spoke volumes, and were vilest calumny.

'Then,' said Donald sternly, 'ye've already said far too much.'

Play-acting, forsooth! . . . A country child.

‘Humph! No better than she should be, I’m thinkin’!’ snapped Miss Turnbull, with hands raised in token of utter reprobation.

‘No one is,’ said Donald. ‘But if you’re reflecting on her character . . .’

‘I wouldna put it past her. . . . It’s what they’re saying, anyhow.’

Sheer exasperation . . . explosion . . . shock!

‘It’s false then . . . false, I tell ye! . . . false as hell!’

That brought the unaccustomed glow to the austere cheeks of Miss Turnbull.

‘There’s a meenister for ye! Hark tae him! Did ever ye hear sic talk!’

Tight-lipped and fiery-eyed, Donald Strachan strode straight to Ballymenach, and people whispered together as he passed unheeding.

This time, the souter did not slam the door. Perhaps, at a glance, he knew it would be of no avail . . . not with that kind of a door.

‘Peter McAllister,’ said the minister, ‘we haven’t aye seen eye to eye; but there’s a matter close to the hearts of us both. I’ve come to ask ye of Morag.’

Somber eyes peered up at him from under craggy brows. These years had wrought a big difference in Lang Peter. The dull fires of fanaticism burned within him. The weight of deep controversy, of hectic antagonism, of championship of a challenged faith had crushed his brain a bit. He was unbal-

anced. Gloomy sentiments of the past, once under fire, had become veritable obsessions. And he was one of these slow-thinking, slow-going beings, to whom obsessions are dire hurt.

‘And what may Morag be to you? Who gave you the right to interest yoursel? She doesna belong in your kirk. She . . .’

‘I’ve kenned her frae a bairn, and I’m seeking tidings of her. She was my first leal little friend, and true, here in Ardarroch. I welcomed her to the fellowship o’ the believers. I taught her . . .’

‘Imphm! And a bonnie job ye made of it!’

‘That’s as may be. She’s left us; and haply there may have been faults in the two of us: you, her father after the flesh, and me, her spiritual father . . .’

‘Faults! . . . Me!’ interrupted Lang Peter. ‘Ye talk to me o’ faults, who was aye lecturing at her, and correcting her.’

‘Aye, that I do,’ said Donald impatiently. ‘Think ye that’s the first and last o’ a father’s duty? . . . Oh, what’s the use? . . . But it’s true word of her I want; and, if ye accept what’s noised abroad regarding her, I ken her better than you do. Ye canna persuade me there’s aught wrong wi’ Morag’s behavior, wherever she be.’

‘Aught wrang!’ screamed the souter. ‘Come ben the hoose. Come ben . . .’

He led the way into the neglected parlor, a dreary little room now, which sadly lacked a woman’s care. He turned the big family Bible on

the table, and threw it open at the pages between the Testaments. There, in an oval space framed in leaves and flowers, was inscribed the genealogical table of the direct line of McAllister, from Peter's great-grandfather . . . honored names, though humble. Peter had reason to be proud of it.

But it was the black stain that closed the list that for a moment staggered Donald, as though a fist had smitten him between the eyes.

'Peter McAllister wed Elspeth Lawrie, May 20th, 1885.'

And underneath:

'Issue . . .'

A name had been there . . . Morag's name, and the dates of her birth and christening, lovingly inscribed by a mother's hand, but now foully obliterated, blacked out, indecipherable. Rank blasphemy in its suggestion. The dread entail of all that the scandal-mongers had hinted. Donald had known of names thus blotted from the family Bible. But Morag was not like that. His heart was torn for the little lass. None dare say Morag was like that.

Donald's fists were clenched, and his eyes were on fire.

How had she lived over there, friendless and alone, in the big city? He had canvassed the possibilities time and again in recent months. Morag was a shrewd little soul in her way. Come to think of it, she was not likely to have cast herself adrift from home and friends with her eyes shut. Doubt-

less she had a place to which to go. One of the summer visitors had offered a situation, if ever she cared to come to Glasgow . . . something like that. These capable Highland maids are always in demand. Only . . . there was little of subservience in her. Donald knew his Morag. He could see her in wrathful revolt against a domineering mistress, dismissed, with little in reserve, fighting a gallant battle against overwhelming odds.

Taken to play-acting, they were saying now. After all, why not? It had seemed, at first thought, absurd, impossible. But the Christmas pantomimes were on. She had a bonnie face, and the singing voice that was part of the make-up of a McAllister. What was to hinder her from getting a place in the chorus? And Colin Urquhart's guid-brother on the Govan force had gotten wind of it. Aye, that was likely enough. The Highland folk draw together just naturally in Glasgow. And he thought the news might surprise some of the unco guid in Ardarroch. It did.

Donald, himself, had never approved of the theater. He had simply been brought up to disapprove of it, along with other forms of worldliness: drinking, and gambling, and so forth. He had never really thought about it and analyzed his disapprobation. But now, faced with the possibility of a Morag on the stage, he was amazed at the ease with which he could condone it. After all, was play-acting of itself a mortal sin? Was it like to blot a fair name from the Book of Life? Absurd! Surely

even Peter McAllister could not regard it in that way. What was it he had heard . . . believed?

But Peter McAllister was a fanatic. Peter McAllister counted his daughter a lost soul when she merely borrowed her fare to Glasgow. To Peter McAllister, a runaway daughter was a prodigal daughter. Aye, to Peter McAllister, there was no such thing as mere play-acting.

‘What does it mean?’ Donald demanded.

His eyes narrowed, and he seemed to enlarge, expand, till he towered over the grim souter. He was going to have the truth of it. He would not be gainsaid.

‘It means she’s nae daughter o’ mine, that will leave a God-fearin’ hame, to go dancing and singing in the haunts o’ vice.’

The old man’s voice had already taken on the high-pitched whine of a morbid zealot, which was, of itself, enough to steady Donald Strachan. He was out on a crusade for his Morag’s good name, prepared to fight down, trample underfoot, and utterly exterminate whatever it was that assailed it; and he found on the instant that only unsubstantial specters were ranged against him, prejudices, unwholesome superstitions. He drew himself up, and bade begone forthwith every shapeless monster that haunted the dark of mystery. This was something he could discuss with an even mind.

‘Ye mean the pantomime,’ he said sanely, almost humorously.

The souter’s eyes flashed fire.

'I've heard it euphemistically so-called. Mysel, I'd call it the fore-court o' hell.'

'What an unhealthy mind ye have! . . . And is that all there is to bother ye?'

A clenched fist came down with a crash on the dusty table.

'All! . . . Ye ask me: Is that all? . . . Is't no enough?'

'No; it's not enough for the hullabaloo ye're making . . . not near enough. Do ye actually mean to tell me ye disown a lassie for joining the chorus o' a pantomime? God bless her! . . . Blot her name out o' the family Bible for . . . for *that* . . . I'm ashamed for ye, Peter McAllister.'

For a moment it looked as if the souter were about to fell his visitor to the earth. With an effort he restrained himself.

'Keep your shame for yourself, Donald Strachan, who need it sore,' he urged. 'This is what comes o' the whigmaleeries and embroideries ye hae putten afore the Word o' God. Aye; shall a man gather grapes o' thorns, or figs o' thistles? This is the result o' your ministrations. Look to yoursel, Donald Strachan.'

The minister listened in silence, nodding gravely.

Then:

'Aye, aye; but get ye forth, and trample underfoot the black lies the scandal-mongers whisper of an innocent maid.'

'Ye canna tell me a maid's innocent that's done as she's done,' shouted the souter. 'Get ye forth

yourself, and do as it pleases you. She's naught to me.'

'Aye, that I will,' returned Donald. He would, too. And he gazed at his former beadle with something of amazement. Despite his indignation and impatience, he was conscious of a real pity for the benighted soul. 'Ye're a dour, thrawn body, Peter; but I'd never have expected this of ye. Bethink yourself, man. We're not in the dark ages. There are many things, I'd have ye ken, worse than earning an honest living in the theater.'

'Honest living!' Peter worked himself into a fine frenzy. 'A painted woman on the stage, pandering to the foul passions o' men . . . the lusts o' the flesh, and the lust o' the eyes, and the pride o' life! That an ordained minister o' the Gospel should seek to condone sic ongoings! It's . . . it's . . .'

'Havers!' said Donald. 'I never was in a theater in my born days; but I'm thinking I might be apt to venture if Morag was to sing.'

Peter threw out his hands in a gesture of despair.

'What pantomime is it?' asked Donald.

The souter glared at him suspiciously.

'How do I ken? . . . Think ye I'd inform you if I did?'

'But it would be gey easy to find out and seek her there, if so be ye're alarmed about the health of her soul.'

'Me seek her!' quavered the overwrought cobbler . . . 'her that has left home and kin, and taken her journey into a far country!'

‘Aye. . . . So the father ran to meet the prodigal, and . . .’

‘The Devil can quote Scripture to his ain uses, Donald Strachan. . . . No, no; this is no repentant prodigal, I’m thinking, to come yammering: “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight.” . . . No she!’

‘Nevertheless, Peter, ye’ve forgotten something. If ye turn up the story o’ the prodigal in the fifteenth o’ Luke, ye’ll find two stories, besides, that deal with the search for the lost. Aye, the Master took two stories to emphasize the father’s part in it . . . and he put them first.’

Peter regarded curiously the quiet dominant man before him.

‘Ye canna tell me anything o’ the fifteen o’ Luke I dinna ken,’ he girmed. ‘But I’ll no accept your exposeetions, Donald Strachan. I’ve left your kirk.’

‘Aye, aye; never heed the kirk the now. But regarding your daughter, Morag . . .’

‘She’s no daughter o’ mine, I’ve telt ye.’ A frenzied finger quivered again over the ugly blot in the family Bible. ‘Thus shall it be done unto her that hath wrocht folly in Israel.’

He slammed the Bible shut.

‘I, too, can quote the Word, Donald Strachan. If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it frae thee. It is profitable for thee that one o’ thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. He that loveth

father or mother, aye, or children, mark ye, more than me, is not worthy o' me.'

'True enough,' said Donald; 'if it be the sort of love that separates a man from God. But . . . love!'

His whole face lighted up.

'Man, if it be leal love and true that forgets itself and all its poor wee human prejudices . . . love that agonizes to redeem, that's the divine spirit itself, and no mistake.'

Peter doggedly shook his head.

'I'll no listen to ye, Meenister. No specious phrases shall upset the faith o' a lifetime.'

'What if that faith be mistaken?'

'I'll no listen to ye, I'm telling ye. Go your ways. I'm done wi' her.'

'In that case,' said Donald imperturbably, 'you can have no objection to my seeking out Morag?'

'Ye may do as ye please. Make yourself co-adjutor in her sin, if ye will. She shall never darken these doors again . . .'

Darken them! . . . Little Morag! . . . *Darken!*

'Let her name never be mentioned within these walls again. Let all remembrance o' her be blotted out frae the earth. She's deid . . . *deid*, I say! and damned! I'm justified . . . God's glorified.'

Donald turned white. It was just then, perhaps, he had a clear vision of the world, and the beauty of the world, and the spirit of God, enshrined in the heart of an elfin little maid. He knew he would find her. He knew he loved her. And his whole soul

was in revolt against the bitterness and cruelty of the man who had begotten her and cast her off.

Strange passionate words rose to his lips; but he choked them back.

‘Man, Peter,’ he said, ‘you’re not yourself. You’re sore distraught. If I thought this was your reasoned judgment and your final decision, I’d be moved to warn you: Verily the publicans and the harlots will enter into the Kingdom of God before you.’

Peter McAllister clutched the lapels of his coat a moment, as though he would rend his garments.

‘Blasphemy!’ he hissed.

And he pointed a trembling finger to the door.

Donald went forth, and took a deep draft of God’s open air.

It was good to feel the sunlight about him again. He thought on Morag. The sunlight seemed to enter into his very soul.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KNIGHTLY QUEST

(1)

DONALD'S task was easy enough. Despite his Highland prejudices against the drama, even he could not attend Glasgow University and Lyndoch Street Hall some eight years without learning that there are three pantomimes each winter, and, of these, only one is likely to provide employment for an untutored amateur.

The Princess's Pantomime in the Gorbals aye specialized in Scotch wit and Scotch worthies, and a winsome Scotch maid, with a rare pipe, might well be acceptable in the chorus.

Donald chose the Princess's Pantomime . . . it happened to be 'Robinson Crusoe' . . . for his introduction to the delights of the stage; but he was quite prepared to go the round and spend three nights upon his quest, aye, more than that, if necessary. The Royalty Theater was offering 'Little Red Riding-Hood'; and the Royal, up in the Cowcaddens, gave a temporary home to 'The Babes in the Wood.'

As he had anticipated, Donald found Morag the very first night.

At the outset he had an uncomfortable foreboding that the place must catch fire. He had to re-

mind himself doggedly that this fear for the theater had been inculcated for generations on a false analogy with Sodom and Gomorrah . . . that, indeed, on many nights the theater must have been crowded, and remained immune. When he got over it, he found himself strangely exhilarated. The presence of several advanced brothers of the cloth, in full clericals and accompanied by young children, helped to reassure him. His long and carefully cherished histriophobia wilted altogether. It was shrewdly nipped, anyhow, when first he had heard that Morag was in the chorus of the pantomime.

She was on the stage when the curtain went up, conspicuously close to the footlights, in a bevy of singing fisher-lasses, evidently there with intent to give the daring Crusoe a rousing send-off. They lifted a jolly chorus, tripped forward a few steps, joined hands, and gave a funny little kick, withdrew again. Splendid! To Donald's none too critical eye Morag was a very star.

The pantomime had little enough to do with Defoe's classic . . . was, indeed, sufficient to make Defoe turn in his grave; but it was wholesome entertainment. Not a sally that need bring the blush to the cheek of a douce Scotch parson. He thought of the impassioned words of Lang Peter McAllister: 'A painted woman on the stage, pandering to the foul passions o' men . . .' Grotesquely enough, his cheeks grew hot at that. Peter made him blush. Peter would have been amazed. But

Donald put him out of his thoughts. There was that offered him that was more congenial: plenty of music, merry quips, to one strangely unversed in what is technically known as 'Old Stuff,' fascinating rhythm and gorgeous color. The first, fine, careless rapture!

He was a boy again, and a singularly beautiful girl was there before the footlights to charm his soul. The two or three steps and a kick, demanded of her from time to time, were executed with ease and modest grace; and she joined with real abandon in the jocund choruses. Easily, she seemed to outshine them all.

'What a shock it would be to Morag if she was to spot me here!'

He cowered down a bit, lest his very presence should militate against her palpable success.

She was to appear often, in divers rôles, and ever she brought a new delight: as a mermaid, who had considerable difficulty on occasion in managing her spangled tail; as a cannibal maiden, in what looked like a cannibal Bank Holiday Excursion to the desert island; as a court lady, indescribably grand and haughty, in a scene that could never possibly have occurred to the mind of Daniel Defoe; and finally, in the Grand Transformation Scene, as a symbolic figure representing France in a galaxy of all the nations of earth. The stage was gay with apple-blossoms, and fountains played in the background, and the representatives of the nations grouped themselves effectively on a broad flight of

steps, while the doughty Robinson, in a nice new suit, led the Principal Girl down front.

All too soon the Good Fairy appeared, soaring a little jerkily over their heads and brandishing a star on the end of a wand.

'Noo that ye're hame again, we'll a' be glad.
Tak' Leezie, Robbie; marry her, ma lad.'

Admirable counsel.

Leezie and Robinson embraced; and, on a riot of song and dance and light and color, the curtain descended.

By this time Donald's hands were raw with applause; and every bit of it had been genuine, and addressed to Morag.

He had no thought, of course, of seeking Morag behind the scenes. He would not have known how to go about it; and it never even occurred to him.

'I've heard tell there's a stage door. That'll be somewhere at the back.'

And a brief voyage of discovery, more daring than any venture of Robinson Crusoe, brought him to a dingy portal, where he awaited her with such patience as he could muster. To tell the truth, he was weirdly agitated.

His clerical collar had aroused no comment in the theater; but the sight of a minister hanging around the stage door moved a shocked gamin to withering reproach.

'Awa hame wi' ye! . . . A fine ane, you are, to be sportin' the dog-collar!'

Donald paid no heed. It is doubtful if he even heard.

At last she came, slipped out into the open, modestly and becomingly dressed . . . Morag, as he had known her of old, infinitely dearer and nearer to him than the transfigured young person he had admired and applauded on the stage, yet still glorified by that young person's witchery. She was accompanied by another maiden of the chorus, but Donald had no eyes save for the girl of his heart.

She saw him at once; and a warm glow lifted to her cheeks. Her hands went out impulsively toward him. Then she stopped short . . . looked as if she were about to fly. The color ebbed from her face as suddenly as it had come.

Donald had hastened to greet her, and he just grabbed her hand.

'Morag,' he said, 'what it is to see you again!'

'Aha!' . . . the monitory voice of the urchin who had appointed himself *censor morum* . . . 'I'm watchin' ye.'

'I . . . I'm no going back,' Morag stammered.

Donald smiled on her.

'Who's said anything about going back? Ye're going to do precisely as you please.' His firm hand-clasp was greatly comforting to the perturbed chorus-girl. 'Have ye no welcome for me?'

'I have that, Maister Strachan; but . . . but this place!'

Confronted by Donald, she must needs gaze

again through the horrified eyes of Ardarroch upon the theater . . .

‘A monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen!’

‘I dinna ken what ye maun think o’ me.’

‘Naught but what’s good, you may be sure, Morag. I want to congratulate you on a very fine performance.’

‘Con . . . congratulate me!’

‘Aye; that I do.’ Donald chuckled. ‘My! but ye made the grand wee cannibal!’

Morag’s eyes grew wide. She was astounded, and at the same time curiously uplifted.

‘Ye mean to tell me ye were there . . . inside! . . . at a pantomime!’

‘Assuredly so.’

Here was daring and sacrifice beyond anything ever attempted by the knights of old. Morag could scarce believe her ears. And, surely, any one might have heard the vehement throb of her heart.

‘And you came here . . . to a *pantomime*! . . . just . . . to find . . . me!’

‘I did that, and I’m more than glad I did. Aye; I’d go a long way farther than that to find you, my Morag.’

‘Oh, I’m no worth it . . . I’m no worth it . . .’

‘Ye’re a funny wee lass,’ laughed Donald.

‘I’m just black affrontit ye should have seen me.’

‘Havers! I liked it fine . . . every bit of it.’

Morag was hard to convince.

'Ye'll never can haud up your heid in a pulpit again.'

'Won't I, though? Don't you worry about that. It was a most edifying experience. And I'm proud of you, Morag . . . proud of you, I tell you. I kenned fine you could sing; but I never kenned you could act like that . . . Great!'

'But I danced,' Morag reminded him with a shudder.

'Hoots! Miriam danced before the Lord.'

This was vastly reassuring. Verily, a man among men! Still . . . the dark eyes clouded.

'I'm no going back.'

'All right; all right. Ye've said that before.' Donald laughed convincingly. 'No objection to my walking home with you?'

Morag's companion intervened. She had been standing by with some impatience. Neither of them had given her a thought. Indeed, she had been treated precisely as if she had not been present . . . treatment to which she was entirely unaccustomed.

'Bide a wee, Mister. I'm in charge o' Morag.'

There was something protectively maternal in her attitude . . . no real antagonism, but a palpable determination to see that all was as it should be.

'Wheesht, Maggie!' said Morag, scandalized. 'This is Maister Strachan.'

Maggie thawed visibly.

'Oh, you're Donald Strachan? . . . Imphm! I've heard tell o' you.'

‘And this is Maggie Dempster.’ Morag had stirred suddenly to a sense of her shortcomings.

Donald raised his hat, and bowed gravely.

‘Let’s hae a good look at you,’ said Maggie.

Donald stepped, bareheaded, under a convenient street-lamp, and meekly submitted to Maggie’s scrutiny.

That earnest chaperon was satisfied.

‘Ye’ll do,’ she decided. ‘I’ll awa. I’m no going to play gooseberry for any one.’

And, regardless of Morag’s frenzied expostulations, she hurried off.

‘Ye’ll no be heeding her, Maister Strachan. Maggie means no harm. But she’s gey suspicious o’ men-folk, and . . . and she’s been unco good to me.’

‘Put both the two to Maggie’s credit,’ said Donald. ‘I’ll not quarrel with her on either count. I liked her attitude finely. . . . Now, tell me all about it.’

And, as they walked through the gloomy purlieus of the Gorbals, and round by Cumberland Street into Crown Street, where, up a forbidding-looking close, Morag shared a room with Maggie Dempster, she told her story: of those latter days in Ardarroch and the growing depression that terrified her, of the wild outburst into the unknown away from all she could no longer endure, of her efforts to keep body and soul together.

‘Aye; Mrs. Findlay bade me come to her if I ever wanted to go into service. She bides over to

Pollokshields. But she was suited. And I had to walk the streets all the first night . . .’

‘And nothing to eat?’

‘No; but I wasn’t heedin’ that. The very next day I got a place, and three shillings earnest money.’

A fine little domestic Morag would have made but for her fiery temper. She had, single-handed, made a charming home for Lang Peter.

She told how she had forgathered with Maggie Dempster, and been drawn to her by the bond of a broad Highland tongue . . . a salesgirl who had been in the Princess’s Pantomime two glorious winters, and was counting the days till the call might come again; how, released from her situation for somewhat excusable insubordination, she had been persuaded by Maggie, sore against her conscience, to interview the stage manager of the Princess Theater, and submit to voice trials, through which a daughter of Lang Peter McAllister must needs come with flying colors.

It was an absorbing tale, told as only Morag could tell it, and Donald drank in eagerly every word of it.

Vaguely, and a little reluctantly, she spoke of her self-reproaches and heart-pangs and misgivings during the rehearsals, endured and overcome by her insight into the heart of a pal. The chorus could not be altogether without the pale, could it? Maggie was a chorus-girl, and Maggie was the salt of the earth.

'Good logic,' commented Donald.

'And that's the whole story,' Morag concluded. 'I dinna ken what'll befa' me when the pantomime closes; but something'll turn up. And . . . and I'm no going back.'

Donald, mindful of his last visit with Peter McAllister, hardly thought it would be wise. He had another scheme in mind, anyhow.

'You're a rare plucked one, Morag. Aye, and I'm passing proud o' you.'

'Are you that?' said Morag. '... But tell me about Ardarroch. How's father? ...'

Already they were at the door.

'Finely, finely,' said Donald. 'But I think all that'll have to keep. I've lots of things to tell you. I hope you'll let me come and see you again in the morning.'

He spoke almost diffidently.

Morag looked up at him with all her heart in her eyes, as of old, and a great gladness possessed him.

'Ye need never question that, Maister Strachan.'

'There's a big thing I'm going to ask of you, Morag ...'

'A big thing!'

'But no the now ... it's just on the chap o' twelve ... high time ye were indoors and asleep, with the strenuous kind o' life you lead.'

The simplicity of a child was in the girl ... and, oh, the light in her eyes!

'I'll do anything for you, as weel ye ken ... except, only, I'm no going back to yon.'

‘Never fear, my Morag. I’m not seeking to persuade you. . . . Now, good-night. I’ll be here in the morning.’

‘I’ll be lookin’ for you,’ said Morag. ‘Good-night.’

He was gone.

(2)

The promise of a clergyman in Mrs. Harrison’s humble lodgings, the following morning, was sufficient to put the best parlor at Morag’s instant disposal.

And Donald came.

Morag met him on the stair-head. She had been watching for him from the window for an hour, the while Maggie peacefully slept. She greeted him with both hands, as a bairn greets a man, looking him straight in the eyes. Donald Strachan was the one dear familiar thing in all her troubled universe.

And there was all the tidings of Ardarroch to retail. How her father’s heart was hardened . . .

‘I’m no heeding,’ said Morag dourly . . . and, as an afterthought, ‘but puir father! He maun be a lonesome, lonesome man.’

‘Aye; he’s all that. He misses you sore. But he’s a bit dour . . . rather like yourself, Morag.’

‘Am I so dour?’ she asked fearfully.

‘Oh, not beyond measure,’ Donald weakly compromised, ‘. . . and, haply, not without reason.’

Then Farmer Sneddon’s brood mare had broken a leg, and had to be shot.

‘A judgment!’ mused Morag.

And there was a new cottage projected, up the loaning beyond Auchinhaun; and Donald had been allowed to retain the manse till such time as the Wee Frees might find a minister; and some one wanted to rent it for July. . . . Oh, and the garden had been in a fearful state, and there was a blight on the currants.

Sorrowfully, his erstwhile gardener shook her head.

Donald talked on quietly. It was all balm to the homesick girl. Glasgow is no abiding-place for a maid that was born and bred in Ardarroch. But ever, on her slightest suspicion that Donald was trying to win her back to Ballymenach, she returned to her determined avowal.

‘I’m no going back.’

‘No,’ she protested. ‘I canna go back to him. He’s never been a father to me.’

Morag was in tears.

Donald was by her side in an instant, his arm about her. It was astonishing how readily and naturally her dear wee head settled down on his shoulder.

‘No, no, my Morag. This is the place for you, I’m thinking.’

The girl started like a frightened fawn . . . gazed earnestly up into his eyes. There was that in them now that reassured her utterly. No coyness about Morag! Why should there be? She had never, since her first sight of Donald Strachan, made the

slightest effort to conceal her feelings toward him; and this seemed just the poorest sort of moment to begin.

Nevertheless, it was astounding, what he was saying.

'I'm only a poor *padre*, Morag.' . . . Donald Strachan!! . . . 'But you've taken all my heart, and I needs maun tell you so. I little knew how much I loved you till you were gone. Can you forgive me that, Morag? Can you come to me? I need you sore. Can you love me enough, think you, to come to me?'

And bravely Morag answered him.

'I'll come to you, and go wi' you . . . to the world's end, Maister Strachan.'

So they plighted troth. And the dawn came up over all the years before them.

'Could ye no say Donald, Morag?'

'I maun try; but it'll seem gey queer at first . . . Donald.'

Donald laughed happily.

'Sounds fine to me.'

'But I misdoubt ye're making an awful mistake. Ye'll never can show face in Ardarroch again . . .'

Donald, apparently, was willing to risk it.

'Gin it pleased you to make your home in Ardarroch, my Morag, we'd go there, and Ardarroch would just have to make the best of us. But I doubt if you'd be happy there. That's all that concerns me in the matter. There are other places than Ardarroch . . . other kirks. We'll start afresh, you

and I. I've got a call to a place no a hundred miles frae Innerneuk. Just think on that. Yon's the grand locality, I can tell you.'

'Aye,' said Morag in happy contentment.

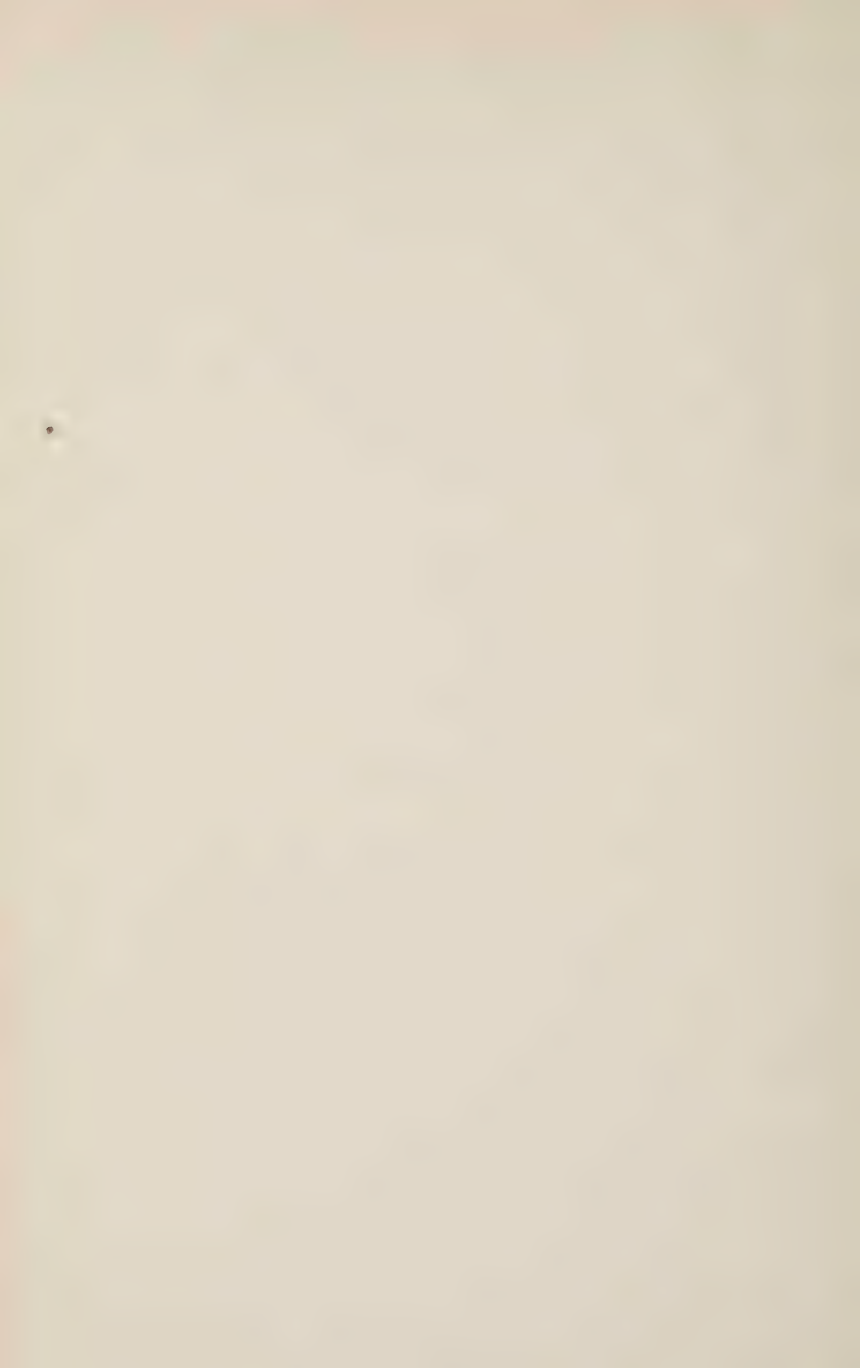
With Donald, any place were Paradise. Oh, but she would be the right true wife to him always.

A horrible thought suddenly occurred to her.

'Ye're sure, Donald, ye're no doing this just to . . . to save ma soul?'

Donald stoutly repudiated all ulterior motives. Somehow he managed to carry conviction to her heart.

THE END



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